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ABSTRACT

The Ontario Industrial Workers' research site offered a basic analysis of issues relevant to the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) research and the labor education community. Project goals revolved around the need to examine development and applications of a new PLAR instrument, the Skills and Knowledge Profile (SKP), which is uniquely suited to examine the types of strategies, practices, and capacities that working class participants typically use. Primarily qualitative data from interviews were analyzed. SKP exhibited "situated" dimensions which, from a worker's standpoint, largely determined the perceived effectiveness of the instrument. Social organization of skills, knowledge, and learning processes were seen as a significant issue in the context of working class learning strategies, workers' practices, and progressive application of PLAR instruments such as SKP. In discussions of PLAR, SKP, and labor unions, notions of class consciousness were intertwined with informal learning relations. Intersection of class consciousness and development of critical views on the power relations among forms and conceptions of skill and knowledge led to the notion of a Workers' Knowledge Bank. In in-depth discussions, workers indicated the practical use/value was embedded within the process of administration itself and SKP provoked new understandings of

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one's own skills. (Appendixes include 94 references and interview schedules.) (YLB)

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THE FINAL REPORT OF THE "LEARNING CAPACITIES IN THE COMMUNITY AND WORKPLACE PROJECT": UNIONIZED INDUSTRIAL WORKPLACE SITE (ONTARIO) WINTER 1998

NALL Working Paper #45-2001

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The Final Report of the "Learning Capacities in the Community and Workplace Project": Unionized Industrial Workplace Site (Ontario)Winter 1998

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Like most reports of this kind, it owes everything that's useful to the ongoing struggles of the workers involved, in this case, theCommunications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Local 200-O.

Both on their part and mine, it is a product of unionized intellectual labour. Workers like these re-invigorate the spirit of progressive social change at the hand of union rank-and-filers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The "Learning Capacities" Project

The basic goal of the "Learning Capacities in the Community and Workplace" (LCCW) research project (1) was to understand and to build upon the existing learning capacities of working people. In this way, project researchers entered the research process with a focus, first, on facilitating already existing practice. This report deals with only one specific site within the larger overall project (see figure 1). Other sites included Community-based Training and Literacy program sites in both British Columbia and Ontario. Overall, the LCCW project offers an important in-depth look at working class learning that is essential to the continued development of PLAR scholarship - including building our understanding of variation across employment status, literacy levels, gender, group settings/organizational context, and even region.

In the LCCW project, our general interest in working class learning was combined with our interest in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR(2)). PLAR can be defined as,

> ...the process of identifying, assessing, and recognizing skills, knowledge, or competencies that have been acquired through work experience, unrecognized training, independent study, volunteer activities, and hobbies. PLAR may be applied toward academic credit, toward the requirement of a training program, or for occupational certification. (Human Resource Development Canada, 1995)

These combined interests led us toward the design, development and pilot-testing of a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition tool that would be uniquely suitable for use by and for working people. The tool we developed and tested was called the "Skills and Knowledge Profile" (SKP). The SKP was designed for the recognition of the practices of a diverse range of working people; and, in this project working people themselves, in the context of its actual use, were to be the primary judge of the tool. We entered the research process with a prototype SKP (generated through a review of previous research). As Morais (forthcoming) outlines, the SKP underwent considerable modification in the course of this research. In the end, the suggestions of workers were woven with our analysis of the interview data, our review of previous research, as well as the results of a series of workshop and conference presentations - all of which provided critical feedback that allowed SKP to be better understood and more effective to use.

1.2 The Industrial Workers' Site

The Industrial Workers' research site involved chemical workers in the Greater Toronto Area. The main products of their labour include automobile and home-appliance coatings, as well as household paints. Organized by the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the workplace employs approximately 144 hourly-waged production workers.

The selection of this particular union local was based upon its progressive track record of effective collaboration with allied union, academic and community researchers. The local union executive participated in a selection process in which a range of workers of different backgrounds (n=12) were asked to volunteer a significant portion of unpaid time in order to participate in the study. The selection of the workers was meant to reflect the make-up of the workplace itself(3) (age, sex, schooling, union activism - see Table 1). Interviews were audio taped which facilitated the development of detailed field notes.

In addition to academic publications, a companion video tape of this project was produced by the workers. This video was produced to educate other workers on the issues of educational

Table 1: Research Participants

FORMAT	SEX	SENIORITY	ACTIVISM	SCHOOLING	INTERVIEW
RR	m	7	m	l	s
GT	m	6	h	l	g
VH	m	10	l	m	g
DJ	m	13	l	h	s
BD	m	6	l	h	g
RD	m	6	m	h	s
TV	f	23	h	m	s
WL	m	13	l	l	s
DM	m	2	l	h	s
MP	m	2	l	h	s
DP	m	17	h	l	s
LR	m	14	h	l	g

Notation Key: Activism (h=past/present elected member; m=activist;l=non-participant); Schooling (h=post-secondary schooling; m= high-school; l=less than high-school diploma); Interview Format (s=individual interview; g=focus group interview)

research, workers' learning and PLAR specifically. The technical work of producing the video was done collectively by the factory workers themselves drawing on their own, informally developed expertise, skills and knowledge; and, in an instructive way, the video itself - in the process of its collaborative production - is an example of precisely the types of activities and strategies this report is meant to deal with.

The data are primarily qualitative: loosely structured, in-depth interviews. While there was a series of questions and issues that were to be examined in each meeting (see appendices for interview schedules), often the most relevant material arose at points in which interview probes were pursued and the interview appeared to be more of a conversation broken up by extended personal narratives.

The general structure of the encounters was as follows: a brief introduction of the SKP and research; discussion of SKP as it was being completed by the participant; and finally the interview schedule questions. In addition, the interviews were completed using two different formats: individual interviews; and, a focus group format. Each format had its strengths and weaknesses, however it became clear that for understanding informal, collective learning - collective research methods/settings have a particular importance. As we'll see, particularly in section four of this report, traditionally denigrated, denied, underestimated, or ignored forms of knowledge and learning practice seem to gain fuller and clearer expression within collective formats. Indeed, it is probable that in the absence of, and on-going struggle for, viable "proletarian public spheres" (Negt and Kluge, 1993) - collective research formats are not only better to assess and recognize social processes such as learning, but actually contribute to their full, transformative development.

1.3 Goals of the Research

The LCCW project utilized what is known as the "Participatory Action Research" (PAR) approach as its general underlying method. As Sawchuk and Martin (forthcoming; also see Forrester and Thorne, 1993) point out, selection of methodologies are an important element of social research with unions. PLAR fits well with values of union culture such as participation, respect, and direct action. While we must be ever concerned about over-simplified notions of the "'innocent researcher' working in solidarity with the oppressed" (Fischer, 1998:100); nonetheless, PLAR methods offer opportunities for educational researchers to work, in allied fashion, with the labour movement. The approach assumes that one of the most effective ways to do good, practical and effective social research is to actively engage with the people who are being researched. This means that as much as possible the research "subjects" are to take an active role in directing the outcomes of the research. This also means that as much as possible the

goals of the research are produced based on the needs of the interviewees as they see these needs themselves. Of course, the formal structure of the academic research funding process in Canada and elsewhere partially work against realizing these types of goals. To obtain funding, research proposals must have a pre-established focus, they must typically be sponsored by professional researchers who often must agree to use traditional social scientific techniques. Despite obvious constraints, the structure does, of course, present opportunities for flexibility. In the case of this research, there was enough flexibility to see that interviewees and their organizations contribute significantly to the ultimate directions and outcomes of the process.

To put this 'flexibility' to good use, dialogue must occur with interviewees and where available the groups that help represent them. In the case of the Industrial Workers' research site, this involved listening to the needs of both individual worker/interviewees, and the labour union of which they are members. And, in this report the ongoing directions, suggestions and information provided from each were reflected in the final products. As could be expected, the information from individual workers was most often directed towards issues like how the SKP could better suit them in their individual circumstances, whereas suggestions that arose from the local union (speaking through its elected representatives) revolved around collective concerns. Both types of suggestions affected the development of the SKP as well as the actual collection and analysis of the research itself.

Each research site in the LCCW project had its own unique features. In the Ontario Industrial Workers' research site, we are dealing largely with employed, English-as-a-first language, male, skilled or semi-skilled, stable-income earning respondents. There is little doubt that these features greatly affect the priorities and issues seen as relevant. In this site, the three basic issues that workers appeared most interested in pursuing are outlined in Figure 2. These three basic issues can be seen to have been woven into virtually every aspect of the research site work; and, in turn, these issues form a strong thread that runs the length of this report.

Figure 2: Emergent Workers' Issues

i) Understanding the relationships between schooling, training,
knowledge from the experience of workers' themselves.

ii) Understanding the places or 'situations' in which PLAR tools
such as the SKP have the potential to make a contribution to the
lives of working people, and to anticipate the situations in which
they probably will not.

iii) Establishing policies and local practices that would produce some
lasting change in workplace or local union structures.

1.4 Understanding Previous Research

Efforts to understand previous research in the field of PLAR take on new and unique meaning as they mesh with the concerns of particular individuals and groups at the different research sites. While I won't offer an exhaustive review of PLAR literature here, there are several relevant findings that are of direct interest. As Thomas (1998a; 1998b) has remarked in his work on the development of PLAR in Canada, the literature is generally comprised of "a good deal of polemical, anecdotal and technical how-to-do-it

material, but little is research based or contemplative" (1998a:334). Further review of the literature in fact confirms specific weaknesses in three key areas:

- There is a lack of research that deals directly with the views and experiences of (classed, gendered, racialized) participants themselves[(4)].
- There is comparatively little research that deals with PLAR in contexts other than those associated more or less directly to formal schooling[(5)].
- There is a general lack of theoretical development of the meaning of "informal," "experiential," "incidental" learning[(6)] on which PLAR is largely based.

Each of these gaps can be considered in the light of this research. Specifically, the data add a great deal to our understanding of such issues as: the relationship between past learning experiences, expectations and experiences of the PLAR/SKP process; PLAR from the vantage point of a largely ignored social group; the possible use of the SKP outside formal schooling; and, our ability to assess the theoretical implications of PLAR.

The domination of PLAR literature in North America by institutionally-based policy and procedural, 'how-to' work is an important realization if we're to understand the kind of shift that this research seeks. Here, participant vantage point, and the social setting are outside the mainstream. While in the Britain PLAR has made an important jump to more direct connections with the world of work through the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) structure (Evans, 1992), and in France ongoing efforts have seen experiential learning become more closely integrated with both work and professional accreditation (Perker, 1994; McDonald et al., 1995) - the research gaps cited above seem to persist. In Europe as well as North America, it appears that PLAR remains a relatively isolated movement unable to make progressive shifts beyond the realms of mainstream education.

Another issue in the PLAR literature that is relevant to the Ontario Industrial research site is the issue of control over information. This involves much more than merely guarding access to personal records, although this is a part of it. Rather the issue can be understood in slightly more abstract terms as implicating issues of the social construction and organization of knowledge itself (Michelson, 1996). Butterworth and Bloor's (1994) comments are relevant here:

> ...the apparent 'openess' of APEL is a promise never realized: what [participants] experience is closure, a selective process of higher education reasserting itself, social control rather than empowerment. (Butterworth and Bloor, 1994:17)

Far from being a concern of academics alone, this was an issue that, as we'll see below, workers also identified as central to understanding PLAR. The situation in which the SKP is used is at least as important as the character of the instrument itself. The web of social and historical relationships that "set limits and exerts pressures" (Williams, 1980) in the formation of meanings and activities must be viewed as an essential component of PLAR discussions. Michelson (1996) makes much of this very issue. She suggests that PLAR (APEL) processes have the potential to strip participants of their knowledge, making them the object (rather than the subject) of information gathering and knowledge development processes. In her terms, the remarkable potential of PLAR is accompanied by the danger of hyper-exploitation, surveilance, discipline, etc., i.e. "Galileo's telescope meets Bentham's panopticon" (1996:192).

> I would argue, however, that APEL can become an important venue for revisiting the relationship between authorized and devalued forms of knowledge precisely because it formalizes it. It is therefore a node for negotiating epistemological visibility and for re-examining the notion of authoritative community. (Michelson, 1996:194)

While there are a wide array of approaches to take, here is a level of critical theorization that is typically

missing from PLAR literature, but which must be made essential to it.

The division between theoretical abstractions and more practical concrete issues may not be as deep as expected. In fact, as we'll see below, Michelson's concerns over the internal power relationships between dominant and subordinate knowledge forms parallel those of workers. The important difference, however, is that rather than riding a wave of theoretical discussion, workers begin from their own history, and ongoing struggles in the workplace and community. Like the LCCW project itself - the workers begin their theorizing from already existing practice.

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2. SITUATING THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE PROFILE

One of the most important findings at the Industrial workers' research site concerned the situated and objective character of the SKP. On the one hand, the SKP was understood to be an objective PLAR instrument that was being developed to translate skills and knowledge into something tangible for further use/exchange. On this account, particularly in terms of tailoring the instrument to the needs of working people, the development of the SKP has been very successful. Our research team reflected upon and made use of a myriad of feedback including comments from: individual employed and unemployed workers; women and men of a wide range of ethnicities and personal backgrounds; labour unions; community and literacy professionals and activists; community college and Human Resource professionals; and, an inter-disciplinary and international range of academic scholars. As Morais (forthcoming) outlines, the SKP represents significant improvements on the PLAR process itself from the perspective of working people. The SKP was seen to be a stable and relatively objective opportunity to represent existing skill and knowledge.

On the other hand, this research also revealed relevant 'situated' dimensions of the SKP (Sawchuk, 1998a). These dimensions emerged in the assessment and collection processes, but most clearly in the application and recognition practices, i.e. the ways materials actually enter into social practice. It is in actual practice that the SKP gains its particular identity as an educational tool. The LCCW research team outlined four types of practice to which PLAR could contribute:

- Personal development;
- Academic development including the recognition of credentials from outside Canada;
- Collective development of community life, social organizations, and social movements such as labour;
- Job-related/career development.

These four contexts have been unevenly weighted in past discussions. As a group of labour educators and researchers has remarked:

> While there is some understanding of PLAR's use in the first two contexts, we feel the creative approaches to the application of PLAR in both workers' own communities and on-the-job lag seriously behind. Using these contexts as a starting point, we've identified a number of more specific purposes which expand the application of PLAR. (1998:4)

Similarly, in this research rank-and-file workers highlighted the way that the actual meaning, usefulness and even subjective experience of any PLAR instrument, including the SKP, is dependent upon the context of information collection, development, application and recognition.

For these chemical workers, the situated character of PLAR/SKP processes emerged as an important element. As we'll see below, according to workers the processes of identifying, assessing, and actually recognizing and rewarding prior learning shift radically from context to context. Participants spoke at length about several specific contexts: schooling; the workplace; the labour market; the local union; and, the home and community.

2.1 "Listening In"

Rather than passively and superficially commenting on the SKP and PLAR - many of the chemical workers in this research actively discussed deeper issues such as the meaning of learning, the uses of education and training, and the relationships of the workplace and the labour market that affect their lives and their learning. Given the general research methods used in the LCCW project, a relevant way to present its findings is to allow the reader to 'listen in' on the perspectives, reflections and meanings that workers are making of the issues themselves. At this early stage in PLAR research with industrial workers, it is vitally important to offer a level of descriptive depth, what some anthropologists call "thick descriptions", of the workers' perspectives in order to inform further research later on. Serving these purposes, I offer generous quotations (in both number and length). Who better to describe workers' practice then workers themselves?

2.2 SKP and Formal Schooling

> Well say if I wanted to go back and get into the health and safety field and you had a background like I had, this would be really good I think. It would help transfer all the stuff I've done. (RR)

As outlined in section 1.4 above, PLAR and instruments such as the SKP are most often discussed in the literature in terms of their application in connection to the formal schooling process. As the worker quoted above suggests, prospective students would typically use the PLAR process[7] as a substitute for traditional progression through formal schooling. Students would get credit for learning they have accomplished outside of formal programs and would be allowed to enter programs, or even skip certain requirements if their experiences were certified through an accepted PLAR process. It is generally understood that this is a way of making the formal education system more efficient by not duplicating the lessons taught outside of school. Embedded in this perspective, however, there is also a tacit analysis of inequity: an admission that mass schooling has its 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Thomas, 1998b), and that PLAR may be a means of allowing the outsiders the chance they missed the first time around.

It is important to note that the formal schooling context of PLAR offers its share of contradictions as well. The liberatory overtones that accompany so much of the policy discussion surrounding PLAR may be somewhat premature. Although detailed longitudinal research is only now emerging, evidence from Ontario Community Colleges, for example, indicates that (rather than drawing in new populations) PLAR processes simply expedite the careers of existing students (Thomas, 1998b). While this reflects a gain in the efficiency of the system and accelarated growth of credentialism, it says virtually nothing about "liberatory" potentials. In fact, there is every reason to think that, despite the growing credentialization of society (Livingstone, 1998), educational systems are every bit as reproductive of existing social conditions as they ever were. The by now well-worn dynamic of 'them who has - gets' in Participation in Adult Education (PAE) research extending back to the early part of the century in the western world (Ward and Taylor, 1986; Training Agency, 1989; Candy, 1991; Courtney, 1992) would appear to be alive and well.

> Those who have not completed high school and those who occupy manual, blue-collar occupations are far less likely to be represented among the ranks of the educationally participating. It is a phenomenon whose socio-economic structure has hardly altered since the first systematic surveys documented the relationship in the late 1920's (Courtney, 1992:5)

The situation is made all the more serious when we carefully consider the apparently progressive additions of programs such as Paid Educational Leave (PEL), and now PLAR. While we cannot dismiss the progressive potentials of these and other tools of social/educational transformation, they clearly are no panacea. Rather they must be understood in context. These otherwise progressive programs can no more be understood outside of general efforts towards social change than these general efforts can be understood outside of practical, concrete programs.

Many of these critical views about PLAR were voiced amongst the chemical workers as well. For example, despite the progressive appearance of the SKP process, workers said the social context of schooling - with its drive for efficiency and integration with the needs of the (capitalist) world of work

and labour market - would probably cause people to be no better off than before. When asked if they felt the SKP would help them in making better use of formal education, workers responded with comments such as this:

> Well the only reason I have doubts is because again you're dealing with *a kind of management.* Now we're sitting in this room in 1997 and we're under a looming teacher's strike. Like they're trying to restructure the educational system, so right now as we sit - yeah, I would like to say [the SKP] would [increase opportunities], but I don't know. Like there's other factors, but if they accepted it and said yes we will make this part of our system to help the mature adult student to further their education I'd be all for it. This would be a great tool to help people figure out what you're looking for, what you already have and is it really going to be important to take a course to give you something you already have, or can they give you something that would free up time. Here, you don't have to do 3 years or 4 years - you only have to do 2. We don't have to re-teach you. (LR[8])

Workers outline the potential efficiencies to be gained through the PLAR process, but cite important reservations drawn directly from their knowledge, experience and understanding of work and management imperatives. What was called "a kind of management" was a dominant logic of an institutional system, which included schools, which workers felt put the progressive nature of the instrument in serious jeopardy.

2.3 The SKP and Work

Interviewees focused a great deal of their attention in the interviews on issues of work and the workplace. Several outlined potential positive features of the PLAR and SKP process.

> For myself, this would be good if you have to go out and get another job or something. *You wouldn't take this in as a resume or anything* but you could go back and look back on it and it can refresh your memory on different things... This would be real handy to take it in with you to fill out an application too... (RR)

Here, the SKP was seen as a personal resource to help a worker conveniently negotiate the application process in their job search. It was thought to facilitate the quick and easy transfer of previous learning histories into the standardized forms that employer's typically provide the applicant. In the context of the workplace however, major reservations about the liberatory potential of PLAR/SKP process became clear, especially in terms of its use for workplace promotions and career development within the company. It should be pointed out that this particular company is no 'back-water' operation. Indeed, in company literature and policies it promotes itself as a company that is intensly interested in ongoing training and the development of a knowledge-intensive labour force. It is an expansive multi-national with net sales in the coatings and resins division alone of over 3 billion dollars in 1997 (Company Quarterly Report, 1998), an extensive structure of training and Human Resource development, and is part of a sector of the North American economy that, contrary to many others, continues to experience growth in capital investment and relatively stable employment levels (Industry Canada, 1997). It is just this type of workplace where we could reasonably expect to see the use of leading-edge initiatives such as PLAR. By increasing the efficient use of "human resources" alone - PLAR practices would seem ideal for this and other corporate settings.

These workers, however, tell a different story. They recount a working environment that does not value workers' knowledge and workers' skill/career development. In this extended portion of the focus group transcript, workers outline the relationship between getting a job, getting promoted, and the potential use of PLAR/SKP processes. Alternative viewpoints are expressed in the group discussion, however in the end the prerogatives of management control were thought to outweigh the potential gains that PLAR might offer.

VH: First I have a hard time thinking [the company] would look at anything other than the standard information. I mean, they look to see if you have grade 12. If you write down no, then your gone right

off the bat. And would [the SKP] make any difference with human resources? *Unless their culture changes or their thought processes change* - I don't think it would. We have to face the reality of the workplace today - it's who do you know. If you don't know anybody you have a real hard time.

DJ: But *something like [the SKP] might be very good because it's different.* I was doing resumes a while ago and I found out that anything that makes me stand out that makes them stop and take a look, 'Well what's this? I've never seen anything like this before.' It's a nice profile of the person. They don't have time to go through everything carefully. They look for highlights and for something that stands out, but at least with this you can look like something different... But any more than 3 or 4 pages and they're going to go - fine. Then in the garbage.

GT: One of the key claims you can make in this day's manufacturing climate is to say you know a lot about the quality process and the whole nine yards there. *It's a lot of bullshit, but the fact is that's what employers want and that's how they run their businesses.* Things such as QS-9000, ISO... that's one thing that employers look for... I'm not saying that I lied or anything, but I used that as something that stands out.

RD: You gotta think that today, *you got 500 people applying for a job* and if it's just the basic resume, you're not going to get looked at - you gotta have something different.... But like [VH above] said, I have to agree, in our company anyway, you know there's lots of nepotism and stuff and in terms of somebody *getting a fair shake off the street, it's not realistic.* It doesn't happen. We all know that from where we work.

VH: *It even happens within the plant*, like we have some women who wanted to transfer out into a better paying job in the plant, and [management] wouldn't let them.

GT: They said they were *over-qualified.*

VH: And yet, they like to espouse how in their hiring practices they're into "diversity" yet here they are holding women back in the plant!

I: So taking what you've been saying, then this [SKP] might make you look too qualified!

All: Exactly! That's right!

The emphases throughout the transcript portion help draw our attention to several key issues that arose throughout the research. Similar to perspectives voiced within the PLAR research community internationally, there is a mix of optimism and scepticism. While some workers express hope that the SKP will allow them to stand out and compete as individuals in the context of high unemployment, others warn that the company really isn't interested in capturing skills and knowledge but is interested only in the short-term bottom-line, balanced with control over the production process. For workers, this situation produces the concept of being "over-qualified" - a notion workers felt was antithetical to either fairness, efficient production, and even legitimate self-expression.

> How can you be over-qualified? How could you be over-qualified to be a garbage man? What does that mean? I mean if my life-long dream is to be a garbage man - then I want to be a garbage man! It doesn't matter what schooling I've got or whatever. (BD)

Often finding or creating interest in their jobs to balance the rigid and alienating structures of capitalist labour process - workers outline how they take pride in the development of extensive knowledge of

work processes[9]. It is important to say that, in relative terms, few workers interviewed found any particularly profound sense of satisfaction in their work. At the same time however, rather than making workers over-qualified and encouraging them to seek employment elsewhere, workers described how they accumulate skills and knowledge in and for application to the daily activities of work; and, that this development of skills and knowledge was one of the main sources of intrinsic satisfaction. In discussions about how this process of skills and knowledge development is impinged upon by management, workers typically offered explanations such as the following:

RD: I think an important point to bring up is, at our company *we don't have any apprenticeship programs* right now for the simple reason that the company, I think, *they don't want to educate the people outside their area* because they might just go looking for a job somewhere else. Don't move them around eh.

GT: That and, the just the basic cost of it. Given the economic circumstances of today they can get millwrights for the penny. Get one for 9, 10 bucks an hour right, so there isn't the demand there for them to train any of us.

VH: *I think too it's basically that if they officially recognize it, they're going to have to pay for it right? They're getting the knowledge on the cheap right now. We're providing it basically free of charge,* you know why would they want to formally recognize it and then have to compensate for it.

RD: .... [following discussion of a particular workmate having appropriate credentials and seeking promotion] On top of that is that when they hired him originally he had to fill out all his credentials and stuff and they had all that down, and they obviously wanted him because they hired him right. But when it came down to the crunch *they wanted to keep him in production* instead of allowing him to move to maintenance.

Again, several key issues are highlighted above which outline the internal contradictions of what, on the surface, should be a straight-forward process: people with skills and knowledge seeking to apply them productively in the workplace for fair compensation and intrinsic satisfaction. Relations of power and control dominate. Control over information, control over skill development, knowledge, and ultimately the production process are central features of any possible use of PLAR.

> What I find, with this company is that [management] promote worker driven products, until it becomes worker driven. Then it becomes, 'Oh they really know what [workers'] are really doing out there and we can't control it anymore'... (LR)

If knowledge is power, then employer resistance to the use of PLAR in the workplace involves far more than merely not wanting to have to pay for legitimate productive skills. From the company's perspective it makes a good deal of sense to attempt to maintain control over production knowledge through the recognition process - the very process PLAR is designed to democratize. One of the most practical issues for the company then becomes the control over internal career progressions - again, a process that PLAR, when used properly, might tend to democratize.

PLAR and instruments like the SKP, when used in the workplace are an ideal way to share information, to facilitate promotion, to recognize how and amongst whom suggestions for greater productivity, safety, work-life quality, etc. are actually being generated. In fact, the general notion of the assessment of workers knowledge and skills, and maintaining a record of this assessment has not been lost on management at the plant. Several workers recalled previous efforts of the company in this area. Efforts however that ultimately became blocked somewhere before the point of use.

> About 2 years ago they gave out these forms asking what you've been trained on [including informal training], what you need training in and it never really came to anything, but there

were people who were saying like I don't want to be answering that stuff. (BD)

I had a form that I filled out once for the company. I completed it and I signed it, but they never asked me for it so I never handed it in. I have it I'll show it to you. (TV)

Programs such as the company's training inventory are not the only initiatives to appear, then sink into practical irrelevance. Workers outlined how the company's formal training courses for new skills are sometimes abandoned. Both management and workers seemed to arrive at similar conclusions that, as the existing workplace structure does not seem to actually facilitate the use of these particular types of (formalized) skills such initiatives are probably not the best use of (company's) resources and (workers') energies.

[workplace courses are both] good and bad. They teach you just what they want you to know. They'll put something on and teach you, but as far as sticking to using it they don't. That's why a lot of people now don't bother, they feel they're wasting their time... As far as following through on a course, the company follows through on it when it's feasible for them, but if turns out not to be feasible, forget it. (RR)

In this context, workers' experiences with another workplace tool ("Team-Building" structures) may be relevant here. Experiences such as the one outlined below teach workers the lessons of social context and the role it can play in the assessment, recognition and use of skills and knowledge:

I was the only union employee to be a part of 7 to present Team-Building skills for a period of a year and half [at the workplace]. During that time I will admit quite honestly, that I truly believed in the Team-Building, how it worked, how it could help us out with union and non-unionized workers and management especially. Because we know in the past, not just with this facility but with any jobs out there, there are problems when you're trying to speak to someone in a prestigious, or I guess you'd say, higher position in the company because sometimes your managers, presidents and vice-presidents, etc. are really hard to talk to. So I saw *[Team-Building] as a tool we could use to open up the door to allow us to say what it is, from the floor, that we'd like to see expecting management to meet us half-way.* And I fully believed it was going to work and I was promoting it for a year and half and fully believing in this. And people were saying to me, 'Ah you're nuts!' Those are who I called the 'Hard-Cores'. *Those people who've learned by experience when to open your mouth and when to be quiet, and they'd say, well we're going to be quiet because we know what it's like to speak our minds.* And here I was doing it for them, and a lot of them were saying, 'You're really nuts!' But others were saying, 'Good let's hope it works.' But now I can say, that I've found that five years later that it has not changed a bit. All they're doing is changing a couple of words, making you feel a little bit better about things, but when you go to approach management with things that will improve the workplace, your surroundings, even your people to help them understand what's going on. Management says, 'We don't have time,' 'No we're not going to bother,' 'No we're not going to do things that way.' It's like, we are the people who are going to make this work, and yet here you are suppressing us. So once you're suppressed, once, twice, well with me it takes a little longer, but soon I'll be just like the rest and say [sitting back with arms folded], 'Do what you want because you're going to anyways.'.... You're listening to me but you are not hearing me. And on top of that, they'll take the best out of your ideas, put it aside and when you're not looking, bring it out and say, 'See the idea I've got! Isn't it a great idea?' All this without even recognizing the person who it actually came from. (LR)

Though "Team-Building" and the use of PLAR are very different, they are both directed towards integrating knowledge and skills, previously untapped by management, into work processes. They are also both touted as means by which worker's skills and knowledge could be shared, assessed and recognized. Thus, it is possible that experiences of "Team-Building" from the perspective of workers both in North America (e.g. Parker and Slaughter, 1995) and abroad (e.g. Fitzgerald, Rainnie and Stirling, 1996) can offer a good deal of information on just what we can expect from PLAR in the context of the workplace. In other words, under what conditions can we expect the liberatory dimensions

more or less associated with both to actually emerge?

The workplace and labour market context for the use of PLAR concepts and the SKP can be seen to offer significant limitations. There are hopes of individuals becoming more marketable within and beyond the plant, but workers typically realize this merely heightens overall competition rather than altering the overall situation. Despite usefully assessing the vast array of skills and knowledge that workers have - the SKP process in these contexts provides few, if any, of the liberatory dimensions so often touted by PLAR enthusiasts. Rather, it appears that PLAR must be linked to broader progressive programs and/or social contexts if it is to bring about significant progressive changes for workers.

2.4 Understanding Working Class Learning Strategies

Before moving onto discussions of other alternative uses of PLAR/SKP - in order to more fully understand the potential of these alternatives it is important to reflect on the types of practices and strategies that instruments like the SKP are meant to assess. I argue here that well-grounded alternative perspectives on the conception of learning itself are central to realizing the liberatory dimensions of PLAR. From the beginning this was one of the interests of the LCCW project, and the Ontario workers' research provided a good deal of important information.

One of the central contributors to the notion of *working-class learning strategies* in the Canadian context, has been the research group working out of the Centre for the Study of Education and Work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. Discussions of the basic concepts began back in the early part of the 90's and crystallised in a large-scale qualitative study called the "Working-Class Learning Strategies in Transition: Home and Work-based Perspectives" (WCLS) project (Livingstone, Hersch, Martin and Stephen, 1994; Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming). The basic goal of the project was to establish a qualitative data-base of the learning strategies of working class households in the context of economic restructuring. This research focused upon unionized workers in five key economic sectors of the Canadian economy (Auto, Chemical, Garment, Service and Steel), and in particular began to document the substantial "informal learning" in which working class people typically engaged. Since then, several other large scale projects have been initiated which, partially, seek to follow the major trends discovered in these areas - the most impressive being the first ever Canadian National Survey on Informal Learning (Livingstone, forthcoming) which arose, in large part, in response to the WCLS work. In turn, the LCCW project fills a gap in this research by looking at the strategies of working people in conjunction with a specific assessment and recognition tool, the SKP. Based on this research, it is now becoming clear that many of the basic trends and relations of learning identified by the WCLS project have continued relevance for use in understanding issues such as PLAR. Briefly, the notion of working class learning strategies refers to the plans and practices that working people typically make use of in response to ongoing struggles as working people in advanced capitalist society. Issues of vantage point are of central relevance in the concept, as is the suggestion that working people react to (in a complex mix of resistance, accomodation, appropriation and domination) existing educational forms, and produce their own emergent forms of educational practice.

For an example of the type of relations of informal working class learning that I'm talking about from the LCCW project, we can take this workers' experience. As a young man in a detergent factory, this worker learned a valuable skill that in fact helped him gain his current production job at the chemical plant. Amongst other things, the story helps ground the idea of how working class communities, and in particular skill bases are regenerated.

> I was doing just some basic maintenance and cleaning and *it turned out an old guy taught me how to weld.* And it just happened that a job came up for maintenance and you gotta know a lot of stuff like welding and I had a lot of stuff, *but I remember they wouldn't accept the welding that I'd learned at the plant....* One of the guys from the maintenance shop who I was working with and he was supposed to build this railing system, and I was cutting all this tubing for him and we were talking and he says to me, 'Have you ever done any welding?' I said 'No,' and he said, 'Oh well I'll teach you.' *So I just started with some tack welding and I went from there.* (RR)

In this simple story - repeated in a myriad of forms throughout the worker interviews in this research and the WCLS project research - we get a glimpse at the sea of learning on which working class skills and knowledge, indeed capitalist production, are actually based. Rather than formal education (although as we'll see below - this is pursued as well), working class learning strategies are based largely in the cultural networks of community and workplace.

The historical-social relations that direct workers towards these kinds of practices (and away from others), and in fact give these practices the meaning that they have (for workers) are key dimensions of working class learning. These are the relations that have traditionally produced the skills and knowledges on which the working class community depend. These are, in fact, the very forms of skills and knowledge regeneration that are in continued jeopardy within capitalist society: in fact, forming a practical expression of the inherent contradictions of capitalist production. As Smith has recently observed,

> [There is a] dependence of industrial production on systems of storing and transmitting skills that were buried in the informal relationships between stable working class communities and large-scale industrial enterprises. These systems of storing and transmitting informal skills have been disrupted and virtually wiped out in processes of technological and managerial restructuring which have radically reduced the numbers of workforce in a given industry and hence its ability to sustain a stable working-class community over several generations. (1998:168)

The main point here is that if we are to understand dynamics of working class learning we must see it as dependent on the viability and ongoing stability of cultural communities which produce specific networks upon which people individually and collectively draw. It follows that we must view forces that tax, or indeed as Smith observes threaten the existence of, these communities as important structures of *learning* itself. Thus the closure of a workplace, the instability and transitory nature of employment, diminished discretionary time for participation and other effects of capitalist "restructuring" - far from providing the mere backdrop for people's ongoing activities - to a large measure define the possibilities and limits of them. We can thus begin to talk about working class learning as not simply as a preliminary concept, but one that can be empirically analyzed not only for structures and determinations, but also potentials for change, or what sociologist call 'human agency'. From a Marxist perspective which places class struggle at the centre of historical change, we can begin to understand "working-class learning" as a dimension of cultural practice generally, and a conceptual means of analyzing the motor of societal transformations within capitalist society.

Working-class learning is structured by several key variables, and the workers in this research outlined these variables clearly. We can first consider the structuring effects directly related to the political economic conditions including (to name only a few): issues of falling real wages (and the need for a dual earner household to maintain consumption levels); issues of tariff regulation and "free-trade" that locate shifts in capital investment; and, the effect that competitive pressures have on actual collective bargaining options in the realm of workers' learning. Looking at the way discretionary time is structured in working class life begins to direct us toward the patterns of participation of working people in cultural life. As one worker expressed it:

> It's like that sixties fantasy about more leisure hours that never came true. In fact now to make a decent living because of taxes, inflation, economic factors, you have to work a lot longer hours to maintain the lifestyle you had, or the lifestyle you want to have. So really on top of it all, your time is even more limited because now instead of having that 32 hour week and all this leisure time, now you've got to work 40 hours a week minium. So you have to lose something somewhere and it's either sleep or time spent doing things together... [it's often the] social interaction. (RD)

The loss of this "social interaction" time, far from simply a luxury for workers, is also a major blow to informal discretionary activities such as the development of skills and knowledge. In this regard, balancing the requirements of work, housework and child-care is possibly the most important issue. Here one worker outlines a typical situation in whcih he and his partner both try to take local courses to

upgrade their skills and seek to stay afloat in the "new" economy.

> So where [other people] may be getting quote, unquote sufficient sleep, say 6 or 7 hours a night. I have to operate on 3. That's why when I came in today, buddy says to me, 'Are you alright? Did you get your sleep?' I joked 'No,' because I got to bed at noon today and I had to get up by 2:30 so I've had 2 and half hours of sleep. But that's what I guess I have to do for now to keep moving forward, and do the housework and go to work... (LR)

Similar descriptions of how basic human limits are tested were provided throughout the interviews, and such pressures are not unfamilar to most Canadian working class households. Indeed a membership study by the national office of these workers' union had completed only a few years earlier concluded,

> The economic restructuring path that Canada has chosen over the last decade has pushed real wages down, intensified work, created high unemployment, endangered the environment, decimated some industrial sectors and created others, increased part time employment and reduced government services... It now takes twice the number of paid hours of work to maintain a household as it did twenty years ago. A large proportion of households now have two adult wage earners who are both working at higher levels of productivity, for long or irregular hours. Most adult wage earners, particularly women, are carrying two and sometimes three jobs: that is, one or more paid jobs as well as unpaid caring labour at home. (Communication, Energy and Paperworkers, 1994:2)

Rank-and-file workers such as these generally understand the basic dynamics of capitalist political economy. While optimistic outlooks of the present and future abound in popular media - when workers begin from their experiences rooted in the workplace, home and community, they often identify key contradictions. For example, in considering the drain on the discretionary time workers have available to them for the development of skills and knowledge, the discussion often turns to the effects of globalized capital.

VH: But then again, even in those countries competitive pressures are now coming in to the workplace to take down the
lifestyle they've built for themselves over the years. You know the Canadian company's that don't pay their workers
a fair price and are made to work longer hours are able to offer their product at a lower cost than these european
countries you know with like 8 weeks vacation, you know and big maternity leaves and 32 hour weeks.
GT: But the real pressures are not really from the European markets, it's coming from the Asian countries and the Pacific
Rim... and the southern states [of the United States].
VH: So we go up to management in the next negotiations and we say that we want 8 weeks vacation, paid and what are
they going to say to us - 'Hit the road there buddy! It ain't going to happen!'
GT: But, on the other hand more free time has never been a priority for the North American workers.

Here, in focus group discussion workers talking about learning and the distribution of discretionary time quickly identify key global forces and link them directly to the issues of local collective bargaining.

Linking opportunity to participate in specific spheres of activity, for example paid work - it becomes obvious that if learning is understandable as participation in particular spheres of social activity than it can be effected by the range of social relations that shape society more generally, for example, ageist relations of participation, i.e.

> But finding a job is much more difficult. The older worker, the younger worker - they have to put up with a lot of shift for fear for their job right.... the same opportunities aren't there. (VH)

If employment is segmented vis-à-vis various forms of age discrimination, it is roughly accurate to say learning itself is structured by these dynamics. Indeed, important sources of learning for the working class, like the experience of the young detergent worker's informal welding lessons cited above, are limited by these effects. Older workers' consigned to isolated work or forced into early retirement; younger workers not given chances to participate in training and informal learning opportunities; or worse, people not being given the chance to participate in the workplace at all via unemployment - have their opportunities to develop productive skills and knowledge seriously challenged. Such relations belie otherwise progressive talk of the committment towards lifelong learning, and, as Livingstone (1998) has argued, they may even belie current efforts towards the full development of knowledge-intensive capital production.

The other major dimension which structured working class learning that became clear in the analysis of these data concerned gender relations. Like the patterns of opportunity for participation shaped by political economic variables or age segmentation of the labour market - gender relations also structure learning opportunities. This is accomplished in a number of ways, but most obviously through the persistently inequitable division of household labour which produces differences in discretionary time between men and women. In her fascinating longitudinal research series on working class families (1974; 1994), Rubin reviews household labour time-budget research in working class American homes. Quoting a range of North American research, Rubin indicates an average 17 hour/week difference in discretionary time between men and women. Other sources such as the National Research Council of the United States (1991), cite the figure of 12 hours/week, and the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers review of the status of working families in Canada (1994) sets the number at approximately 12.25 hours/week. While these studies do not directly determine that this time would be used for learning activities - it is worth pointing out that Livingstone's (forthcoming) Canadian national informal learning survey determined that the major reason people do not engage in learning activities generally is a lack of time and opportunity, with the survey establishing the average number of hours of informal learning per week at approximately 15.

As leading Marxist-Feminist scholar Sandra Harding argues, typically those in positions of power are less able to understand the precise workings of those power relations. It is often the case that the social construction of these power relationships are naturalized and assumed by those in the more powerful position. Just as workers are uniquely positions to understand the inner workings of capitalism, so are women uniquely positions to understand patriarchy. This presents challenges to those wishing to generate critical analysis, grounded in the experiences of research subjects, particularly when working with subjects which are overwhelmingly male (as they were in this chemical factory). As the company employed three women workers out of 144 production employees in total - there is ample opportunity to have gendered dimensions overshadowed and generally underrepresented. However, providing there are some basic sensitivities to these power relationships, this needn't be the case. Critical interviewing and analysis of the data allow us to "read" the relations that exist behind the descriptions that otherwise mask patriarchal relationships. For example, when male workers talk about free-time we must probe in order to understand how this free-time is constituted in relationship to the labour required to reproduce not only the household but the household wage as well. As the time-budget study figures cited above suggests - this implicates gendered relations. The lone women in the study characterized her household relations (as do the majority of people) as equitable. Based on the larger amount of data from the male workers, however, we begin to get a view of the character of this gendered dimension, and its effect on discretionary time and learning through a critical analysis of their views on home-life.

> Well it's just *the nature of the family,* the make-up of the family, the age of your children if you've got children especially with *two people working*, to fit that into your day. You know I know some guys at work who get to bed every night at 9 o'clock and you know they get upset if they end up getting to bed at 9:30 because they're really tired the next day. Shit, I haven't been to bed before 1 o'clock for, well my daughter's six years old now. You know you've just got so much to do, you don't have that free time. Either of you. *Especially the female in the relationship just because of the upbringing.* (GT)

> Well for some people it does but like with my wife and I, *we don't have any kids*, and *instead of spending time cleaning the house and stuff like that, we pay someone to do it. We*

> *both work*, why should we spend that time. If I have a day off, I'm not going to spend a Saturday cleaning my house. That's nuts! (DJ)
>
> I can say that, for me my wife and I have changed roles recently. I've become a *house-father*. I'm actually the mom of the house now and the *wife has a job* that takes her out of the house anywhere between 10 and 12 hours of the day. She's also now taking what's known as the Dale Carnegie course. As a matter of fact she's there right now... *Slowly, we're learning that we have to share in the raising of the children*, but in our house we getting to that point where now she can go off and do what she want's to do. I've pushed her to do that because I knew she needed the challenge for things to be more fulfilling. So I opened the door for her, so now more doors open up because of it. So it's an attitude in the house that creates that. (LR)

Here we see a variety of statements that indicate more and less progressive awareness of gendered relations of power and its effects on discretionary time, however there are a number of regressive assumptions peppered throughout. We see, for example, that the material need for the dual earner household as a central material force is beginning to draw into question the legitimacy of 'common-sensed' notions of the "nature of the family", the power of "upbringing", and ultimately notions of essentialized (gendered) identity. It is noteworthy that Rubin speaks positively in regards to the working class household in terms of the division of household labour.

> In fact, it may be that over the last two decades, the greatest shifts in relations between men and women have taken place in working-class families rather than in middle-class ones. Two decades ago I found few working-class men who would even give lip service to the notion of gender equality, whether inside or outside the house. Today many of the men I interviewed are quite sensitive to the needs and wishes of their wives. It's true that this sensitivity often isn't translated into action. But the very assertion of the ideology of equality by men who resisted it so thoroughly before is itself a step forward, the first perhaps in the struggle for genuine change in the family. (Rubin, 1994:78)

What was made relatively clear in this research, and which I've tried to point to here, is that gender relations are not only a significant structure of social life in general, but are a significant structure of learning in that they can be seen to partially structure cultural life and, of course, discretionary time that might otherwise be devoted to gaining desired skills and knowledge.

Finally, beyond the material dimensions that structure the opportunities to participate in specific communities of practice (in the workplace, the community, hobby groups, political activism, etc.) - in this research we can also detect what could be understood as "cultural" features of working class life which more or less directly affect learning practice. A full discussion of studies of working class culture is beyond the scope of this report, and even so the data does not support these features as dominant structuring factors. Nonetheless, cropping up throughout the interviews were statements such as the following which suggest that specific sets of values, inclinations and sensitivities, e.g. values of solidarity, play a role in the way people understand, plan and carry out their learning/participation in society. In this segment, while one worker indicates why informal learning is important for working people in terms of the basic material constraints already discussed, another introduces another important feature, in this case implicating class and formal schooling credentials, introducing an oppositional form of what Bourdieu (1984) has called cultural and educational "capital".

LR: Well some of the difference is because that's the only way we can afford to do our [formal] learning.
I: Do you think that's the only factor?
LR: Yes, time and cost.
VH: No I don't think so.
LR: I do.
VH: I don't think that's the only thing, *it's like do you want to be a management scum-bag. If you want to be*

you have to at least have your university education.... That's where some of this false sense of

superiority
comes from with management. 'Oh well I'm university educated and you're not!' Well, 'Hey buddy, I didn't
want to go through that just to get the bullshit job you got!'.... It's like, I could've done it if I'd wanted to, but
now you're holding it against me because I didn't!

These workers introduce the notion that individualist assumptions inherent within the credentialization of learning in formal education (and the use of credentials in competitive labour markets) are contrary to notions of collectivity and solidarity that characterize relations upon which these and other workers depend. While we mustn't idealize the existing state of solidarity amongst workers, strong statements such as these do give pause for thought. It's clearly possible that people see the individualist assumptions of educational credentials as contrary to the lessons learned on the shop floor and at the bargaining table? If so, we must more seriously consider these and other dimensions of cultural life more generally in assessing the structures of working class learning.

2.5 Making Meaning out of "Education" and "Learning"

> There's a lot of people who don't go to school, *but you can only pick up so much in school.* There's lot's of *stuff you can pick up on the street...* even after a person is officially trained there's still lots of stuff you have to learn and pick up. (RR)

> The problem with formal schooling is it's impractical... I mean *you could be the most practical person in the world but have absolutely no knowledge of what to do in a school setting*. So what we're doing here [with the SKP] is more dealing with the knowledge not the practical. To mesh the two that's the difficulty. (VH)

> I *really think people get robbed in the real world*. There are people who really could get straight A's in university but they dropped out in grade 10. It doesn't mean they're stupid, *it doesn't mean they deserve a shitty job, but it usually ends up that way right*. (BD)

Academic literature that has tried to understand the power relationships between different forms of knowledge are quite clear in their basic conclusions. In the popular consciousness, the differences between manual and mental labour, the differences between formal and informal knowledge, the differences between skills and knowledge, etc. are distinctions that people use everyday as well as over the course of a lifetime to order their plans and activities. These distinctions are treated as objective and real and of course come to have very real material effects. However, writers as diverse as Bourdieu (1984; 1994); Harding (1986; 1991), Hartsock (1983) and Collins (1986; 1990); Haraway (1988; 1991; 1996) and Michelson (1996; 1998); Smith (1974; 1990); and even Woolgar (1988) and Latour (1987; Latour and Woolgar, 1979) - all point (in very different ways) to the way the meanings we ascribe to these distinctions are actively constructed by us all. The general suggestion is that, rather than being necessary and "real" differences[(10)], these differences rely on the daily activities, and our own collective assumptions and collusion.

This basic realization allows us to look at issues such as working class learning in a very different way than people typically do. Rather than simply seeking greater access to the "canonical" body of dominant forms of skills, knowledge, and even processes of learning - we can begin to see that the practices that people already engage in, sometimes very different from the canon[(11)], produce forms of skill and knowledge themselves. The problem of education for the "missing millions" (Ward and Taylor, 1986) then is broadened to see that subordinated, taken-for-granted knowledge forms must be at least included within, and can at points contest the legitimacy of, the canon.

Important to the understanding of the practices that reproduce (and contest) the hierarchically ordered distinctions between dominant and subordinated knowledge means looking to the daily activities that people, like the workers in this research, participate in that (re)produce these distinctions. While it is impossible for us to draw into view the range of experiences and reflections that have contributed to the

meaning of notions such as "education" and "learning"(12) over a life time - from a working class standpoint, this does not stop us from obtaining glimpses of the development of these meanings. This research provided a venue for workers to discuss important issues and anecdotes that underlie the meanings of words like "learning" and "education" as they make use of them in their daily lives. In comparative analysis of the experiences and perspectives of different workers we can begin to distinguish between idiosyncratic experiences and those that are more systematic.

To understand and suggest the notion of dominant and subordinate perspectives on the meaning of education and learning requires us to first outline the type of relationship that these different (dominant, subordinate, etc.) meanings have with each other. In the analysis of this research I've sought to understand the relationship between dominant and subordinate perspectives as *hegemonic* (Gramsci, 1971). In short, this means that dominant meanings are always contested in practice. Dominant and subordinate perspectives are contained within a hegemonic order (a structure) and vis-à-vis a process of hegemony (in which features emerge, recede, contest, are appropriated, etc.). As such, the concept makes room for the way that new ideas emerge and can sometimes co-exist with a diverse range of ideas, however the concept of hegemony rules out understanding either dominant or subordinate perspectives in isolation from each other. Any discussion of, for instance, working class or bourgeois culture cannot degenerate into autonomous cultural forms.

A more complex view of alternative practices and the relations between them such as the one I advocate for here allows us to begin to approach the contradictory notions that coexist within our understandings and descriptions of notions such as education and learning. Such a process draws into question many of the 'binary' or dichotomous views that inform much of our everyday practice. Take for example this worker's reformulation of the mental/manual dichotomy.

> It's like if you got a guy who's been learning about fixing engines and how engines work in university but hasn't worked on engines, I'm going to take the guy who might not have the schooling but has been fixing engines for 6 years.... *There's theory in the hands-on too.* (BD)

In this example, the worker outlines that the mental/manual division of labour and learning is largely a 'false dichotomy'. There is theory in the hands-on just as their is hands-on in the theory (e.g. see Woolgar, 1988). Understanding this distinction is important for us to clearly recognize the social organization of skills and knowledge when we see it.

This research did not attempt to re-visit workers' experiences of schooling. Though these institutional experiences are clearly *the* major force in generating dominant meanings of "education" and "learning" (Lave, 1988; Engeström, 1987; Thomas, 1991; Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming) - rather in this research the focus was on current activities. Even here however, we can begin to detect features of the social organization of skills and knowledge. One typical experience that workers discussed concerned how those with "clean" white-collar jobs, treat them as 'factory workers'.

> Actually I find it really funny because when we're dealing with office staff or lab staff and when they're dealing with workers on the shop floor, you know, we have guys like John - has got an engineering degree, guys like Rod - who has a teaching degree, I have my CRA [real estate certificate] and lots of things like that, but the people you deal with don't realize this. I'm not saying it is good or bad or whatever, but I just find it funny because in general *they will look down because you are in manufacturing*.... It's like anywhere, they tend to look down on the blue collar worker. (RD)

This is a common form of interaction seen in this and other research with working class people (Sennet and Cobb, 1972; Bourdieu, 1984; Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming). Setting aside the new realities of an increasingly 'credentialized' working class (particularly amongst workers in the higher-paying, unionized manufacturing firms - Livingstone, 1998) - workers engage in interaction on a daily basis (indeed they contribute to this interaction substantially) which reinforce the notion that formal credentials, mental labour and clean work are superior. As I've mentioned however, the notion of "hegemonic" entails that this process of domination is never total. As a basic illustration take for

example this short exchange during the focus group session. Here one worker begins by signaling how the formalizing processes of PLAR can be "intimidating". Workers feel they are being measured against some sort of dominant ideal (i.e. "the canon") which is closely tied to the formal schooling processes and credentials. However, as soon as the worker offers this observation it is disputed.

DJ: [The SKP process] can also be very intimidating.
I: Were people intimidated by this form?
All: No. [in chorus]

Beyond these provocative but nevertheless only anecdotal illustrations of the contradictory, incomplete and complex inner meanings associated with education, learning and the PLAR process from the vantage point of working people - the central point is simply that there are complex relations of power hidden beneath this thin veneer. In fact, these relationships and views become increasingly important when, through processes such as PLAR, alternative educational experiences and knowledge forms integrate/contest dominant forms which are so coherently integrated with central institutions of our society, namely work, training and schooling.

For those experienced in manufacturing work, or even those familiar with academic literature which provide some insight into it (e.g. Kusterer, 1978; Burawoy, 1979; Peterson, 1986; Terkel, 1974; Hamper, 1992) - it is well known that the appearance of trained engineers and/or management personal on the shop floor is often an occassion to practice, i.e. (re)produce, the clash of dominant and subordinated knowledges. Here formalized credentials, white-collars, and "mental" planners of work in a "clean" jobs meet informal skill/knowledge, overalls greasey from machine fluid, and "manual" work in jobs that are typically hot, routinized, and/or dirty. While earlier research on the topic rarely sought to understand this clash specifically in terms of relations of learning and knowledge - these are semi-regular encounters which, to workers, are important moments through which the landscape of power, knowledge, learning and education are both understood and produced.

BD: Sometimes they ask you your opinions on things, what do you need, how do you do this, how much space do
you need, but *in the end it's all their call right*. I remember one time *we* told them that in this one situation *we*
were getting these sparks coming off, so we were told to start using Nitrus. *We* told them that we didn't think it
was going to work. It's not strong enough to clear the tanks, and then what happens? The guy goes to take the
hose off and he gets covered in paint! It just didn't have enough pressure, it wasn't going to work, but they just
do what they want anyways. *They're the ones with the formal schooling, they're the ones with the high*
paying jobs, they know better then the guys on the floor.
I: Would you say the engineers in the plant have lots of knowledge?
BD: You mean of the process?
I: Yeah, how would it compare with the workers' knowledge?
BD: It doesn't. *We* deal with the stuff. You could be a engineer for Chrysler designing Chrysler vans or something,
but I don't care what you say, *the guys who're actually building the engine are going to know more about*
it than the guy who's writing it down on the blueprint... For sure *we* know things that engineers don't have any
knowledge of. *One is theory and one is practical.*

Speaking about another facet of his job on the floor, the worker goes on to outline his experiences with lab technicians in a similar way.

> There are these Lab Technicians telling you to do things but they don't know. They don't know that there are *tricks to the trade...* These people with *prestigious jobs* don't want to

listen to some *grunt*. (BD)

Other workers reiterate,

> We've had company's and engineers come in with new products like a new pump and they don't know about how it will work because *they've never been there*, and we say, 'No, change it this way,' and they say, 'No we can't do that because it's a poor design,' and we say, 'Well change it because it won't work and we won't want to use your product.'(DJ)

> You get these people with their university educations saying 'Well what the hell could you possibly know that I don't know?' So meanwhile you stand back and say, 'Well go ahead then.' (VH)

As I pointed out earlier in my citation of the range of authors who write about relations of dominant and subordinated knowledges, the distinctions and dichotomies that these selected quotations point to have been recognized elsewhere in various ways; however, anyone wishing to argue, that modern manufacture has truly given rise to a genuine "Team" process and that the skills and knowledge of "knowledge workers" are valued in the modern workplace would be straightened out in short order and in graphic detail by these workers. Prestige, pay, credentials, actual working knowledge, and of course the power to make "the call in the end" - in many ways define these important interactions; and, even in the setting of the research interviews workers only partially contest the legitimacy of these structures. As this research helped clarify, without stable 'proletarian public spheres' the 'isolated' worker is typically diverted from understanding these relations in any other way. In the Ontario (Canada) context specifically, Dunk's (1991) critique of working-class male cultural practices is a detailed example of this diversionary process in which class experiences become understandable, primarily, within the realms of consumption, patriarchal and even racist discourse and practice. In this research, workers entered discussions with a patch-work of experiences that provide ample fodder for producing emerging, alternative ways of understanding knowledge relations, but it was actually in the process of sharing and comparing experiences collectively that provided the engine to begin to convert these experiences into the rudiments of an oppositional framework(13). What's more, it was the connection to broader oppositional structures, in this case trade unionism, that helped keep these developments on track in concrete ways.

Another issue that becomes more clear from workers descriptions of their learning experiences is the inherently collective, social nature of the enterprise. Throughout the descriptions of their learning (as well as the assertion of these skills and knowledge on the shopfloor) workers consistently characterized these practices as definatively collective, collaborative and cooperative. The constant insertion of "we" in the development of workplace knowledge is was standard. While having *learned* (the state of 'knowing') may be individualized (i.e. in some sense it is 'logged' in an individual body), the *process of learning* is more accurately understood as participatory relationships.

Perhaps due to the fragmentary dimensions of these experiences, they do not, generally speaking, generate oppositional plans or practices for workers in relation to formal education. Many workers plan to or would continue to pursue formal education rather than engage in the conscious development of other ways of creating and using knowledge (e.g. in the workplace, community centre, neighbourhood, etc.). While workers appear "resistant" to the hierarchical order of knowledge (with the knowledge they themselves generate typically low on the list), as *individuals* most workers do not seriously entertain developing upon their own alternatives practices.

Of course as is generally well understood, the pursuit of formal education is never easy for the working class. In the Ontario (Canada) context, Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller (1992; see also Davis et al. 1989) point out, this pursuit is wrought with cultural as well as material barriers. In the LCCW data, workers described some of their past difficulties and indicated that these experiences have largely determined the meaning of notions of learning and education. Beyond just finding the time, space and human energy for discretionary "learning" (as discussed in section 2.4) - formal education has been problematic for these workers. Below a worker recounts past experiences of education that are representative of many of the anecdotes shared in this research. One of the defining moments of this worker's view of "education"

came through his attempt to gain a carpentry "ticket"[14] through community college. Obtaining a ticket meant learning through practice (completing various "projects") which sounded attractive. The programs also allowed students to earn a wage while doing the work/learning. This was another important issue growing up in a working class household. However, in practice the program ended up turning this worker away from formal education.

RR: You got to move around from company to company but work was really too hard to find... See it's not one
company that does all the kind of work you need. One company will do one thing that's a couple of projects
another company might do another so you could do some projects there. So you really couldn't get done
because what you have to do is keep going around to all these different companies and there's not a lot of
company's or work out there to begin with.
I: So you gotta do so much running around.
RR: And I got sick of it so I moved up here [to Toronto from Canada's east coast]. In fact, at the end, when I was
almost finished I got two job offers one was for $5.50 and the other was for $6 bucks an hour, but I had to have
all my own tools, my own transportation. It turned me right off the courses. I never wanted to do a college course
again.

Even the 'luxury' of "jumping through hoops" is seldom an option for working class students, and despite the appearance of the right combination of financially supporting himself and an active-learning environment -the notion of "schooling" and "education" through the experience took on a negative character. Another worker recounts a similar story,

> I didn't actually get my mechanics ticket. I went for four years of the apprenticeship but just didn't quite follow through.... I went into [the apprenticeship] and I was working for a mechanic for a really low wage right out of grade 10 [after dropping out]. I went in and out of the program for about 10 years mostly because of financial reasons. (DP)

In cases like these workers are unable to complete their programs and are left with only an employment history of low-wage jobs to show for their effort. For workers like these the credential system could not be navigated and as such served as a filtering process for even the motivated. In this sense, the meaning of the concept of "education" comes to take on the feel of a system of barriers rather than opportunities.

The discussion of "over-qualification" in section 2.3 helps introduce another fairly common dynamic that workers experienced with regard to the relationship between formal credentials, education and employment. Beyond the issues of educational opportunities and barriers - the central issue that is raised in this discussion points to the unwillingness and/or inability of the contemporary industrial workplace to make productive use of (and thus be willing to compensate for) highly skilled workers.

LR: Yeah, *you can learn from the guy next to you too*. That's actually how I learned welding. See Canada doesn't
have a program for a certificate as a fitter-welder. You have to be a skilled tradesman outside this country and
brought in and their programs are usually through the ship yards and stuff like that.
RD: [to LR] yeah, my buddy works for X and they have to test themselves.
LR: [to RD] Yeah that firm is big enough but... When I was working for a place, the boss said that there's no exam
for fitter-welder... but they finally brought over a test and the 10 of us were able to get our certificate that way.
I: So the company helped to get that going?
LR: Oh no, *the company gave us a hard time we had to get it going*. As soon as I passed and I got my

certificate

I walked into the office and I said, 'Here I've got this certificate. I'd like a raise.' They said, 'Oh yeah sure. Your

raise is with a different company across the road and down the street!' Like thank you! So in that case, I've been

penalized for getting an education.

Here, similar to the way the SKP took on different meanings as it was inserted into different social contexts, in these situations formal educational credentials take on take on a negative character. Here credentials do not work for workers but against them. Their choice becomes accepting wages below their skill-level, or having to leave the firm and enter an uncertain labour market. Though they continue to do so in droves, it is a wonder that workers' bother at all.

Here one worker outlines his union's attempt to progressively build upon the informal learning capacities of workers in such a way as to also benefit the implementation of computers technologies on the shopfloor - a plan which was summarily rejected by the company.

> We tried to tell the company that workers will learn stuff together on their own at home, so why don't don't the company offer us rebates on home computers we buy, because what you'd be doing would be beneficial for them too right, and it's that much less training that they have to do. But they said no.... See their general attitude is that their trying to run something but they want to put the sole responsibility for it on the worker. (RR)

Another worker recounts a similar situation in which he poses the question of whether formal qualifications should be understood as a requirement or a barrier in stark terms:

> I'll explain to you what happened, I think we might have a good human rights case actually, what happened was that, there was this women who had worked as a summer student a number of years and *she was completely familiar with all the procedures and layout of the plant* and everything, and when she went to apply for full-time, she was told that *she was over-qualified.* And the union objected and I went to see management about it just to try to get a reason why she was considered over-qualified. And it turns out that she was studying some law course... And she was working at the race track at the time making 8 bucks an hour, so I was trying to get them to explain to me how she was over-qualified if she was doing a job that paid her 8 bucks an hour... So she was caught between be over-qualified for this job and under-qualified for another. The company still hasn't explained to me the use of this term over-qualified.... At our place, which is just your standard manufacturing facility for making paints and resins - I mean it's not rocket science - I think a lot of *the qualifications are manufactured....* I mean the grade 12, *is that a real qualification that you need to do the job - or is it just a barrier* to some people? Especially when you look at the older workers who sometimes have lower grades and also immigrant workers who've been making paint for 30 years and they're still making paint - how's the qualification question fit with them? (GT)

As Livingstone (1998) points out, from the perspective of capital there are several reasons for these types of procedures: control over knowledge and the labour processes goes hand in hand with efforts to compete and accumulate profit under the logic of capitalist production. Only alterations in the structure of work processes (predominantly controlled by capital) can advanced forms of workers' knowledge be productively put to use. Livingstone and others (e.g. Beckerman et al. 1992) recommend that workers do not necessarily need more training, but that the organization of work must be altered to make current skill levels productive and thus "feasible" for the company. Drawing on, amongst other sources, the work of Lazonick (1991) on the structure of capitalist organizations, Livingstone outlines the historical shifts in the organizational structures within capitalism noting that it is through the movement toward democratization of the workplace which would allow the skills and knowledge of workers to be more fully utilized.

2.6 Finding Alternative Meanings for Learning Through Practice

In a recent article on PLAR (RPL) in the South African Labour movement - Cooper (1998) voices concern over the possibility of discursive shift from union education as embedded in practical, oppositional action towards more corporate, individualist discourses of learning and education associated with the emergence of PLAR. She is clearly less optimistic than Thomas or Michelson in her characterization of PLAR as either a means of "rethinking the entire enterprise" (Thomas, 1998:341) or as "a node for negotiating epistemological visibilities and for re-examing the notion of authoritative community" (Michelson, 1996:193). However, though a sensible first response her concerns may be somewhat premature. We needn't throw the PLAR baby out with the "individualist" bath-water. Cooper's dire account is typical of discursive analyses that allow actual material activity to slip into the background. Hegemonic shifts are obviously a complex inter-weaving of discursive/ideological relations within the limits and pressures of actual, ongoing cultural-material practice. In this regard, systematic assessments of the practices and sense-making of rank-and-file workers is an essential, and often ignored, feature. The research presented here is obviously embedded in a different national context, however it does suggest that the shift Cooper speaks of may not be as hegemonic as she indicates. At least the comments of these rank-and-filers do not register such a shift. Indeed, articulated with ongoing community building and collective bargaining, workers in this research seem to 'shift' the other way, i.e. in a more radical direction, when provided with a forum for understanding their experiences and practices from their own class standpoint. "Articulating with" is an important element here. Linkages with practices such as (informal) community building around sharing knowledge/skill resources, and (formal) around putting together new bargaining proposals and perspectives on training and learning is essential for critical reflection to have meaning. While, in Cooper's case, the discourse of some activists, some union representatives, some officers may have shifted, the true proof (as in the pudding) in democratic movements such as organized labour has always been in the rank-and-file membership. In the LCCW research the rank-and-file "proof" tends to support conclusions that are less alarmist than Cooper. This being said, Cooper's essential argument is correct. Discursive shifts are and will continue to be up for grabs vis-à-vis the articulation of these discourses with actual cultural/material practice.

As suggested in the previous section, workers sometimes are able to generate alternative, more transformative notions of learning and education. Again, as I've mentioned above, these views do not necessarily arise from reflection on academic literature nor do they typically arise in isolation. Rather the roots of alternative views of learning and education overwhelmingly lie in actual, concrete collective practices. Re-visiting the situation of the worker above (RR) who vowed as a young man never to return to formal schooling, we see the context in which his view of learning and education underwent a significant shift.

> [Now] I pay a lot of attention to health and safety because you know somebody really has to learn a lot about it or the workplace won't be safe. At first how it was is you would just learn from other workers all the different rights you have, your obligations. And gradually I thought I would start taking courses on my own.... Now the company puts on courses which is their safety program, and me and this other guy we teach it, but with each course I learn more and more. (RR)

Here we see practical needs in the workplace, and concrete responses to these needs and social practice giving rise to a new sense of engagement with formal learning. Informal working class learning networks provide information and valuable perspective, but also the recognition of capacities to take in, process, and make use of complex information. The point here is not that this worker can learn, but that he recognizes these capacities as specifically *learning* capacities. With this basic recognition, confidence grows, and in the case of this worker what I would argue to be an "organic" (Gramsci, 1971) vantage point on education and learning begins to emerge. As a result, he not only begins to critically engage with the formal education system, but even begins to lead courses in the workplace.

The traditional unwillingness of workers to participate in formal education, as mentioned in section 2.2, has been a stable trend for some time[15] - however there is some isolated evidence that factors such as opportunities for greater participation in key spheres of activity brought about, for example, through trade unionism can significantly affect this dynamic. It is worth noting here that in Sawchuk (1997) I examined the relationship between progressive trade unionism and participation in adult education. In

this study evidence suggested that the sense of active engagement in learning/education/training decisions (in the workplace) and the greater sense of control in the workplace brought about through active union locals - had positive effects on workers views of schooling and willingness to participate. In addition, it was seen that workers' participation was integrated into a broader, ongoing, collective learning network amongst co-workers, friends, and neighbours. The data in the LCCW project, as seen in the example of RR above, would seem to support these basic conclusions.

The notion of collectivity appears to be very important in the context of working class learning. As mentioned earlier, as individuals, workers typically affirm dominant views, though in brief and fragmentary moments workers do assert oppositional views concerning the value of their knowledge and skills as something that does not just happen. At these moments - when grounded in viable collective action - workers seem to generate more stable alternative positions. Take for example the following anecdote.

> We're going through a thing right now. There's a move from the old warehouse to the new warehouse and the manager was saying this is how we're going to move things, this is how we're going to do things, but it was done in the guise of consulting with you and brainstorming and basically the guys told the manager to go fuck himself, 'Fuck off we run the place, and we're running it our way.' I mean, really, that's what they literally told them, and the management agreed they said, 'Okay, you're running it. And that's where [the fact that workers do have important knowledge] comes in - why can you get away with saying things like that? Because it's true and [management] know it.... It really wasn't done in a crude, arrogant, militant sense. What they were really saying is, 'We know what we're doing. We know how to run it.' Collectively I think they got 213 years seniority between them and they told them that... At the end of the day the plant manager did recognize what they were saying, they do have the knowledge, they do have the experience, and if it isn't broke don't fix it. But unfortunately workers don't realize how much power they have. (GT)

Several factors appear to have contributed to these workers' ability to generate definitive, affirmative statements of alternative knowledge forms and process of learning through which they collectively obtained them. One contributing factor certainly was the topic area. Unlike understanding of isolated technologies, product-knowledge, etc. - the understanding of actual collective work processes, rhythms, informal norms of participation, and the storage and transmission of vital practical skills and knowledge has always been the relatively exclusive domain of workers. The attempt to re-locate and modify work stations, makes this knowledge central giving the workers important leverage. Workers in this department opposed the original plans and asserted the relevance of their own knowledge collectively. Taken together the opportunity arose for an assertion of working class knowledge. Taken further, an event such as this - which typically becomes a part of a local union's collective oral history - has the potential to ground the development of more transformative programmes of workplace militancy when articulated with existing oppositional structures, i.e. the union local, the bargaining process, etc.

Discussions of informal learning have a comparative presumption: informal learning stands in relation to more formalized learning. "Learning" about different ways of learning, for workers, was a product of practice. In other words, workers learned about alternative learning in the context of a specific set of social relations that were not *based in* the institutional setting of schools (although they did involve reflecting on classroom practice). Here one worker discusses another past experience of the development of a new department in the workplace.

DP: There was a great deal of training, but a lot of it wasn't hands-on training unfortunately. We went for a lot of team
building seminars, quality processing, SPC (statistics) and all this kind of stuff.
I: So together it took a couple of weeks or
DP: Six months.
I: So six months before the [department] was up and running?
DP: Yeah, it was basically for 6 months we didn't produce anything, we were just learning about the technology
and

I: Learning about the process and what it was going to be like?
DP: Right, right.
I: So what were those days like, you just come into work and what, or did you even come into the workplace?
DP: Oh yeah, well some of the time it was off-site but.... We did have one tank in the plant that we were making one
batch of sort of thing, like there were 14 of us swamping around the thing - I mean it was ridiculous, but some of
the courses were good. We took one, I think it was a team building, I'm trying to think of the buzz word they had,
but it was along the lines of team building, I can't think of the name.
I: It was kind of a social thing
DP: Yeah, it was conflict resolution that sort of thing. It was interesting, but most of the training for the most part was
just a joke.

After the 6 month period of formal training, the interviewee described the learning that went on in actual production. This type of learning and these types of knowledge and skill development were the strict domain of the chemical workers themselves.

> It was all hands-on... *We learned basically that the last 6 months [of formal training] was a waste of time*. Obviously nothing worked, and when they were trying to set up the building we were very much involved in you know where things were to go and how we wanted things set up, and of course when it came down to practicality *a lot of it didn't work, which was good*, but the bad part of it was that we couldn't blame it on the company you know because we were involved [laughs]. (DP)

The hands-on, practical and informal learning - in comparison to the more formalized sessions - was seen as the superior of the mode of workers' learning, in part, because they were controlled (collectively) by workers.

I: What percentage [of workers' learning] would you say, is from out there doing it and learning from other workers
especially?
DJ: I'd say about 90%. *The training programs we get are pretty well useless*. They're not very good at all. They give
you just a very basic idea about what's going on and they say, okay, go. But it's the co-workers around you who fill
you in and say, 'Hey - don't do that!'

While the formal sessions undoubtably contributed to the overall knowledge base, it is important to note how the worker characterizes the difficulties experienced during start-up phase in a *positive* light. In the context in which this worker is speaking, this can be understood as a recognition that the control over knowledge and skill is a key component of workers' lives, and that the only direct path to this control is by use of the informal activities involved in actually being there. The point that these workers' comments help to make in this regard is that there is a close connection between notions of the informal and subordinate learning. As writers such as Certeau (1984) and Fiske (1993) have pointed out in the context of workers knowledge, the informal cultural networks are largely definitive of subordinate knowledge forms. While the realm of the "informal" cannot be understood as unique to the subordinate groups such as workers, it is clear that there is a special relationship between the informal and these groups as it is primarily upon these 'hidden' social systems that they depend.

Working class learning, in its most productive and progressive instances, can also be closely linked to the effects of trade unions. In Certeau's terms (1984), trade union structures mark the potential for a shift from informal 'tactical' practices, to socially transformative or 'strategic' ones. As we'll see below, the union structure is a vitally important component for this transformation and this learning. In contrast to descriptions above of encounters with engineers and management authority which do not typically end

positively for the workers (i.e. engineers just "do what they want anyways") - an alternative forum and structure with which to organize working class activities changes the nature of these activities and the uses to which these activities and capacities can be directed.

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3. PLAR AND LABOUR UNIONS

> Every time the company manipulates a worker. Every time a company screws a worker or abuses a worker - then you got a union member. And then *it's up to the union to use that experience to educate the union member and others*. I keep telling them, 'Thanks again you're helping us!' Every time the company turns on the worker that's when the union has to step in and expose them, and that's where the education comes in from the union to make it available to those who want to learn.... Some people in this room learned about health and safety the hard way. They learned about workers' compensation the hard way. Only through their experience. *They never went to any OFL [Ontario Federation of Labour] course or any Union course - they learned it when the employer fucked them* and then they had the time to sit down and say, 'Why'd they do that to me - after all I've given them?' And that's the best, unfortunately it's the hardest as well, the best experience a worker can get because it cuts through all the nonsense, because it hits you directly, it gives you time to think and to read and to ask questions and start understanding what it's all about. (GT)

As this opening quotation outlines, progressive trade unionism has always relied on workers' own learning capacities to both reproduce itself as an organization and to change with the times and issues. As I briefly mentioned in discussion of the effects of progressive trade unionism on PAE in section 2.4 above, these learning capacities are related to the experience workers obtain taking an active role in a key field of social practice (i.e. the workplace).

One of the central emergent issues of the Ontario Industrial workers' research site concerned the relationship between PLAR, the SKP instrument, working class learning strategies, *and* the labour union itself. Of course, in Canada PLAR has been written about fairly widely in terms of vocational education (e.g. Cherry, 1995/96; College of Nurses of Ontario, 1996; Bragg, 1997; Burke and Van Kleef, 1997; Tourangeau, 1997). These sources integrate certain dimensions of the labour process but only in the context of formal schooling, professional qualifications, and individualized action. The relations between PLAR practices and the world of work, training and workplace learning have also been discussed within isolated patches of the international literature (e.g. Carmichael, 1992; Fennell, 1993; Leader, 1995; Inman and Vernon, 1997). However, in Canada PLAR has not been widely taken up amongst labour education researchers. Outside a small cadre of Labour Education specialists (e.g. Gereluk, Briton and Spencer, 1998; Sawchuk, 1998a), and with the exception of the labour perspectives represented within the Canadian Labour Force Development Board - the recently produced Labour Perspective on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition document (NALL-Labour Caucus, 1998) is perhaps the most relevant general statement of the connection between organized labour and PLAR practices to date. This is not to say that PLAR issues have not entered discussions in organized labour circles and isolated unions in Canada as the NALL-Labour Caucus paper indicates,

> For well over a decade now, trade unionists have maintained that PLAR can be a useful tool to help workers get credit for their knowledge and skill. Far too often workers' knowledge goes unrecognized or ignored. A labour position on PLAR reflects a progressive educational philosophy through which we, as working people, collectively develop the tools and strategies we need to identify and fight against inequalities based on race, gender, class, age and ability practices of systemic discrimination which the labour movement has traditionally battled. (NALL-Labour Caucus, 1998:1)

Despite these dispersed efforts however there is, to my knowledge, no previous research that documents the views of rank-and-file unionized workers on these issues which at the same time seek to articulate the full sense of labour's "progressive educational philosophy" mentioned in the quotation above.

Previously in this report I've outlined the contextual nature of PLAR processes which emerge as the process is applied to particular social settings. We've also discussed at some length the theoretical

dimensions of the concept of working class learning strategies and relations of informal learning[16]. In the following section we will deal with the ways that working class learning strategies, informal learning, and the situated character of PLAR combine to make local trade unions an excellent alternative application of PLAR. Before discussing this however it is important to briefly outline data from this research that deal specifically with issues of class consciousness and solidarity building. This is essential, as I suggest above, because the emergence of relevant 'strategic' initiatives require collective action linked to concrete organizational structures like the union local. In this sense, notions such as "class consciousness" and "solidarity" are not only essential components of trade union activity, but are also indistinguishable from issues of "learning" and the development of educational initiatives for progressive, transformative purposes.

3.1 "Learning" Class Consciousness in the Workplace

As Canadian labour historians (e.g. Morton, 1998; Heron,1996; Palmer, 1993) have often indicated, through time workers' collective consciousness of the basic dynamics of capitalism and workers' place in these dynamics has been both a "product" of work and a "project" for organized labour. In other words, relations of work *produce* a level of consciousness (as the quotation which opened section three indicated; in the Canadian context see for example Livingstone and Mangan, 1993 for detailed sociological discussion of class consciousness) as a result of the way that companies typically treat individual workers over time and the inherent nature of capitalist labour process. At the same time, organized labour attempts to build these experiences into a coherent and progressive *project* of social transformation. However, as individuals and even as isolated groups, as I've indicated workers' consciousness is easily diverted.

> [Working class culture] is prosaic rather than poetic... [T]his culture is intimately related to a sense of class, and the rejection of and resistance to a perceived dominant culture [which] is expressed and deflected into non-class discourses. (Dunk, 1991:3)

Class consciousness and learning are related via the types of hierarchical relations of knowledge that I've outlined in section 2.5 above, where I suggested that in order to be developed fully, working class learning strategies and working class knowledge forms must be understood - and practiced - as relevant sources of collective power. If these strategies and forms are subjected, particularly by workers themselves, to denigration or dismissal it is clear that they can never serve as a starting point for social change of any kind. My argument here is that class consciousness is thus not only a "project" for organized labour in terms of its struggle with capital directly, it is also the central means of developing and making use of alternative educational strategies such as PLAR.

Learning and class consciousness in the workplace are, in many ways, inseparable. Workers in this research recounted many anecdotes in which changes in knowledge - in particular through practical experience - was an important event for them on the road to becoming critical, class conscious workers and progressive trade unionists. The flavour of these expereince is expressed concisely below where one worker outlines just such an event.

> I'll give you an example of how people learn. I'm working with a guy, and he turns to me one day and says, 'You couldn't get a better place to work. This place treats you like gold.' I said, 'Yeah! [laughing] All you are is a number. They don't know you by name. When you're time comes up all they see is a number. They don't feel sorry for you.' And he's looking at me as if I didn't know what I was talking about. So he was trying to get his cousin in one time and they wouldn't hire him and he was all mad because look at all the good work he's done, and I said to him 'They don't know you from Adam. Look they don't know how much paint we each put out and they don't really care - I get paid the same as you. The paycheque won't change.' But he's coming around I think. He's kind of iffy now you know he's only had that one experience, sometimes it takes a couple of experiences before you learn. (RR)

To hear workers in this research discuss it, "learning" is the heart of trade unionism. Another worker details a story that appears to be common amongst workers today in the context of Quality movements and TQM[17] generally.

> Well they started calling us "Associates" and then the reality set in, and people started saying, 'Wait a minute! How can we be Associates? Don't we have to work together? Don't we have to work as a team? So if we're not really a team, then your the employer and I'm the employee.' And that's why I said to you earlier that it took a bit for me to get it through my head, but if we were really "worker-driven" then we wouldn't have any middle-mangers. They'd be all gone by now. (LR)

In this case, the "reality setting in" is *the* significant learning experience for this worker as a trade unionist. It is in the presence of progressive informal and formal educational structures that diversions into non-class discourses are avoided, and true labour education occurs. Like several others, this worker makes this very point by comparing unionized to non-unionized workplaces specifically in regard to the effect it has on how workers view their own knowledge and its potential to bring about better conditions.

> In other *workplaces that don't have a union or any other means of educating themselves. They do have knowledge right*, but the trick [for the company] is to keep this knowledge down because an uneducated worker is a cheap worker and one who'll do what you say no matter what even if it's harming them. (VH)

3.2 Solidarity as an Educational Resource

As we've seen in this research and elsewhere, workers learn a great deal in collective, cooperative, informal networks (Sawchuk, 1996; 1997; 1998a; 1998b; forthcoming; Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming). At the same time, central to trade union activity is the notion of worker "solidarity." If we understand workers' solidarity to be roughly composed of, on the one hand, collective action, and on the other organized class consciousness - then we can begin to see important linkages between solidarity, working class learning and progressive educational initiatives such as PLAR/SKP. The development of these linkages would appear to have the potential to make major contributions to the invigoration of union culture and, following this, creatively renewed efforts at social transformation in the workplace and beyond. In this sense the development of solidarity is both a result of workers' collective learning and a contributor to it.

In the context of the LCCW research, one of the most interesting findings was the effect that the process of going through the SKP form, particularly in collective settings, had on workers. As other researchers have noted (e.g. Thomas, 1998b), PLAR processes such as portfolio development have been seen to have important effects on self-esteem as well as self-understanding; however, in connection with trade unions specifically, these otherwise individualized, realizations become something more powerful.

> People don't realize it but if they started writing it down in something like this it starts to click in. Hey, [management] can't do this! They sit and push pencils but they can't do this! It would take them a long time to learn all of this because it took me a good while.... but if not to give to an employer, just to be able to say, 'Yeah, I learned something.' It would make a lot of people feel better about themselves on the floor. It would raise the moral because every job at our place had to be learned. You can't put someone in there and expect them to able to get along without the training. The managers tried to do it. They just hurt themselves and the whole thing stopped dead that time we were out on strike. They just couldn't do it. They reason they couldn't do it was because every job in there had to be learned. (DJ)

In this example we see that, as Freire has pioneered, 'realizing' what one knows is a source of power. The SKP process, indeed the research process itself, becomes a medium for developing another way of thinking about and talking about workers' knowledge and skills. It is an opportunity for workers to seriously reflect on the relations of learning in the workplace, and to see relationships of power in the ways we think about skills and knowledge. To the degree that these relationships are identified, workers' knowledge is (re)asserted.

Re-emphasizing the situated character of the SKP that we discussed throughout section two, this worker attenuated the positive outcomes of occasions when workers get together to share knowledge and

develop collective perspective with some sober reservations.

> From my point of view, *from the workers' point of view* where I'm coming from - I don't think it's too practical. I mean *it's good to write everything down, but as long as there is always the two sides drawn between management and the working class a lot of it is not applicable*. They just are not going to listen right. I'm not trying to be hard-nosed about it, and a lot of it I think is great for the *amongst workers*, but as far as management and workers coming together and people saying, 'Yeah we're going to listen to you.' I just can't see it happening. But like *what we did here tonight I thought was really good. Guys opened up and they talked about the way things are.* The way they really are, not just theoretically like when the company offers "team-building skills" which is a crock of shit. I mean *this is team building right*. (RD)

Real "team-building" is, by another name, solidarity, and workers such as this one came to understand more fully within the research process itself the power of collective action/reflection (i.e. praxis) amongst organized workers.

3.3 A Workers' "Knowledge Bank": Shifting Contexts / Shifting Meanings of the SKP

> In the labour movement [informal learning is] like a tool and it's an excellent one. We've sent people to many courses to require some formal and informal skills or whatever, but this [SKP] would be a good tool to keep a record of their learning, personally, and for a local - to show what people of capable of in the labour sense. And then you can get into things like electronics, and car mechanics, painting and decorating, etc., etc. You could sort of build it out from there. But all with the idea that you pass the learning on. When we teach people it's with the intent that when they learn, they have to come back and teach others. So you're always passing on your knowledge, experience and skills. (GT)

PLAR must be seen as having important potential for achieving recognition that workers have sought since the rise of industrial capitalism. As the NALL-Labour Caucus statement tells us,

> There are already several opportunities to learn from existing uses of PLAR by organized labour. Examples include the United Steel Workers of America's (USWA) progressive influence in the Canadian Steel Trades and Employment Congress (CSTEC) in which PLAR issues are being negotiated in terms of training courses in a number of colleges throughout Canada and a variety of other union locals, such as the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) Local 200-O which has attempted to begin a discussions of PLAR in terms of fuller recognition of extensive informal on-the-job training. (1998:3)

However, it remains to be seen whether Canadian organized labour (and Canada's tripartite training bodies) can achieve tangible, stable structures which will help realize the transformative potential of PLAR. One of the conclusions in Sawchuk (1998a) and in this report is that left to the managerial logics of mainstream institutional settings such as formal schooling or the workplace - PLAR cannot deliver the "liberatory" goods. Following this, it would seem reasonable that PLAR would have the best chances of seeing its most liberatory dimensions emerge in settings congruent with a general conception of the need for social transformation.

In my view and in comparison to existing PLAR literature, by far the most interesting idea to emerge from this research concerned the relationship between the SKP and what these workers called a "Workers' Knowledge Bank". Approximately half-way through the data collection phase, workers in the focus group session spontaneously began discussing using the PLAR and the SKP specifically in the assembly of a data-base of workers' skills and knowledge to be used by other workers in the local. The PAR research methodology is flexible in such a way (indeed it demands) that such respondent-generated, action-oriented material be incorporated into the research agenda - thus the notion was integrated into the basic interview structure thereafter. At the time however, with excitement running high workers competed with each other to clarify and refine the idea within the focus group setting. One of the early points of consensus concerned the fact that it would be completely voluntary,

free, informal *and strictly for workers*. The following is the portion of the transcript when the notion first appeared in group discussion.

LR: What I find is that amongst the bunch of us here we'd be willing to help one another outside of work, or whether it be on the job - *we'd be more than willing to help one another*. I have skills that maybe X doesn't have. X has knowledge that maybe I don't have. We draw on each other as a personal thing, I guess as a personal connection, but when it comes to the workplace and management and if you are being resisted for the knowledge you have - *you're not going to give any to them!* So that once again you're forced. This particular [SKP] package is great but it's only going to really work if I give to X or Y or somebody else. Like this is what I know! If I was to read what Z has learned or somebody else, because this is cool. I can say, well look I was actually thinking of doing something but I didn't know who had the skills and the knowledge. All of a sudden I know that my neighbour or a friend or a co-worker has the knowledge and you can draw on it. Because, *they're going to give it to you more willingly than if I was wearing the badge "Manager" or the blue-coat [supervisor].*

GT: *Like a knowledge bank! Like a knowledge bank for workers internally.* [to the group] You know it's like X is a dap hand at mechanics. If anybody want's help winning a grievance - give me a shout! [all laughing]

DJ: And L with the camera there. [L the camera man]

GT: Yeah the camera.

LR: Yeah, it's like when you know that a co-worker like L has this expertise, we keep that in mind and we give him a call. Like I had a video that needed to be done and I couldn't do it. I knew L had the expertise, so I gave him a call and you know. That's just how we do things.... It would be most useful amongst ourselves.

Later in remaining individual interview sessions the idea of the Knowledge Bank was introduced. Typical responses such as, "For sure, great use of the SKP form, but all that kind of happens anyways..." (BD) were recorded. What we see then is that instruments like the SKP have the potential not to create new practices, but rather to make more effective use of the practices, strategies and collective capacities already in existence amongst workers by linking them to existing oppositional structures. Quoted at length, this worker paints a vivid picture of the progressive potential within workers' practices, and suggests how educational practices such as PLAR, and instruments such as the SKP can contribute.

> Overall, I see a lot of value in [the SKP]. Especially the idea that *eventually you can have something in your pocket that's portable to use. A worker can take it with them, to employers.* Ideally, that's what I think this is about. As to the other ideas that were raised today, you can think about the "knowledge bank," which I think is a really good idea. *To me the best learning you can have is the informal learning,* as X called it the education of life. I could go on all day about different examples, but I'll just give you one and it's about politics, and people not equating politics with what it really means. I've been accused in the local of being political, which we should be as far as I'm concerned. But the example is as simple as a guy came to me last week about his friend who doesn't work at our workplace and isn't unionized, and he asked me a simple question about the hours of work the guy should be working. From what I could gather the guy wasn't being paid any over-time and he was working 60 hours a week and he wasn't getting any lunch breaks, so *the education that I've attained through the years - which isn't hard to learn - I basically tried to pass on to him which opened his eyes.* You know like, wait a minute this isn't right. There are

> actually laws governing how long you can work, etc., etc. And you know, I don't know who the guy voted for, and I don't really care, but I said to him, look what I'm telling you right now is subject to change very shortly. And he says, 'What? It can't change! That's a basic.' And that led to a political discussion about how can I change things and what can I do and stuff like that. *So what started as a simple informal question, I tried to develop it into a sort of broad education for him to think about at least. Maybe even do something about. But the point, is you learn everyday, and you teach everyday.... That's right. Because in the labour movement it's like a tool and it's an excellent one.* We've sent people to many courses to require some formal and informal skills or whatever, but this [SKP] would be a good tool to keep a record of their learning, personally, and for the local to show what people of capable of in the Labour sense. And then you can get into things like electronics, and car mechanics, painting and decorating, etc., etc. You could sort of build it out from there. But *all with the idea that you pass the learning on. When we teach people it's with the intent that when they learn, they have to come back and teach others. So you're always passing on your knowledge, experience and skills.* (GT)

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4. THE SKP AND LESSONS FOR PLAR PROCESSES: WORKER'S PERSPECTIVES

In a study of the use of PLAR by teachers for in-service professional development, Butterworth and Bloor outline the type of difficulties that participants typically experience.

> Models of experiential learning follow the 'reflection' stage of learning with one of 'conceptualization', during which the individual analyses the particular experience in terms of more general categories which make possible the transfer of the original learning to new contexts. Accordingly, the Greenwich APEL process asks candidates to produce a reflective account that is *analytical rather than merely descriptive.* Feedback from our APEL candidates has shown how difficult some of them find this task; a *specific difficulty is bridging the gap between their personal understanding of what happened and the kind of account we ask them to make.* Such people may experience the APEL procedures just as Usher's (1989) critique defines them: "mechanistic, time-consuming, and potentially demoralizing". (Butterworth and Bloor, 1994:17 - my emphases)

In this context, participants (teachers) are asked to both describe and understand their learning activities for the purposes of translating them into a recognized PLAR format. It is more than simply ironic that professional educators have such difficulty in this task (see Lave, 1988) though such a discussion is beyond the scope of this report. Certainly, the workers in this research experienced few if any of the type of negative effects outlined above - but why might this be? The sample is too small and the contact time too limited[(18)] to provide any definative answer; however several key issues have arisen that can perhaps help us to understand the pleasure, willingness and productiveness of the SKP experience for these workers in the setting of this research.

4.1 The SKP Process

In this research, workers indicated that the practical use-value of the SKP was, in many ways, embedded within the process of administration itself. Peppered throughout quotations above, we can see that the SKP allowed an opportunity for the participant to collectively and critically reflect on the actual meaning of their experiences and the relationship these experiences have to the notion of "knowledge" and "skill". Success in these terms was more modest in the individual interview sessions. While some workers were able to draw far-reaching connections concerning subordination, their learning/life experiences as working people coming from working families, and the problematic associations between working people and formal schooling - the development of a coherent *oppositional* understanding of these experiences typically alluded them. Some participants in the individual interviews were not interested or able to engage in this type of reflection at all. This latter group of workers confined their discussions to brief answers to interview questions, and typically offered critiques of the physical instrument itself (some of which we'll learn more of below). It is very likely that, as 'meaning' is

generated socially - so tasks that ask people to 'make new meaning' must take place in a social, interactive context which I earlier referred to as a "public sphere". While this confirms the importance of the facilitator role in PLAR, in addition it suggests, similar to the conclusions of George (1994), that facilitation requires deep familiarity, if not solidarity, in terms of the issues relevant to the participant. Thomas and Klaiman (1989) appear to make similar suggestions.

> A witness to an evaluation being carried out by a secondary-school assessor is struck by the degree to which the assessor's experience with the community from which the candidate comes plays a part in the evaluation... (340)

In applications of PLAR to working class groups, this role must be seen as crucially important, ideally suited to members of this group, or deeply familiar with this perspective. Thus the facilitation role is particularly important for individual encounters. The differences seen in the focus group interview format also support this conclusion. The group sessions provided the most expansive and unique data in terms of working class learning, and though the character of the facilitation role was significantly altered it was nonetheless important to the proceedings. In the group session workers frequently made comments that referred to the importance of "People from the same perspective getting together" (RD); or, that "We could call this team-building or workers' solidarity building" (GT).

> Filling [the SKP] out in a setting like this is really good, so that you have time to discuss it, and see each other's and say, 'Oh I never thought of that,' or *'Oh that's education - I didn't think of that as being education.'* Whether you could walk into an employer with it in the current format it's in and how they'd take it - I couldn't really say. The idea in regards to the workers' knowledge bank, or even collecting it in a whole workplace or even workers in general. I can see a lot of value in that. *I didn't really think about it until we all started talking about it actually* [laughs]. (GT)

Another worker remarks,

> Well, I really enjoyed this, but *what I enjoyed most was the interaction.* Because, a lot of times with co-workers once you leave the workplace you just *don't have the time* to talk with all the different workers you work with and to hear other people's views and experience and what's happened to different people and how it relates to each one of us. Because, like it was mentioned, there are couple of workers here that the company put a good screwing to, and as far as I can tell for absolutely no reason at all. I don't understand it, but the thing was I didn't know about it until I started getting it too, and then it was like, 'Wait a second this is crazy!' But if you had more of this type of thing, and not just airing out beefs. But *to find out things that other people are doing, because you get talking you find out that, 'Hey I learned a lot, and like everybody else.'* This shows you on paper what you've learned.... I think this is the greatest tool to give to people on the shop floor working and to give to students because the uplifting experience and the amount of good feeling they'd get when they started filling this thing out because they'd realize, 'Hey, I'm learning things every day. Look at all the things that I actually can do. It could just open the door. *Instead of things just seeming narrow, your outlook could just expand on what you could do because the amount you can learn if you want to is just amazing.* (DJ)

It would seem that the ability to understand one's learning experiences in an alternative way is significantly affected through the interactive, meaning-making connections amongst like-situated people, in this case workers. Clearly, factors in PLAR/SKP success such as these, for which Canadian organized labour could find strategic use, must be carefully considered.

4.2 The SKP Instrument

Another of the means by which the LCCW project accomplished the goal of developing a PLAR instrument suited to working people was to engage in critical ongoing discussions about the instrument itself. In the Ontario Industrial workers' research site the individual interviews produced a several important observations in this area. Just as everyday communication is composed of subtle as well as

more obvious cues, so does the composition of an instrument that seeks to 'communicate' and 'ask' questions of the PLAR participant. What's required is to take the text seriously.

Workers felt that for the PLAR experience to be as successful as possible the instrument must 'communicate' appropriate messages to the participant. By the end of a typical interview session, workers had often developed a expanded set of ways to understand their existing practices, skills and knowledge as having been learned, but more specifically workers tended to understand that - in formal contexts such as this research, Human Resource interviews, or formal schooling - many working class people 'down-play' their own achievements. Workers are quick to point out, that in other settings such as around the workplace, the union hall or the neighbourhood, these experiences are better understood by others and in these settings valuable skill and knowledge are understood as such. These issues again signal the effect of the local production of skills and knowledge as "skills" and "knowledge". Nonetheless, the instrument itself made some contributions to this 'local' production of meaning. Here one worker outlines how cues from the SKP set the stage for a particular type of response (see appendices for the copy of the SKP to which she refers).

> The boxes were good at directing people to things they could be thinking about, but the boxes are way too small... *Do people kind of look at you funny when you ask them to put all their learning in these boxes? They kind of keep you from wanting to try to fill in as much as you can...* It probably looked all nice and symmetrical on the computer screen but, if we are going to do as you say and try to list all the different things we learn each day, *then the page should say that to you.* I mean, there should be rows and rows of blank sections under a whole bunch of different headings so people get the impression when they're writing things down that, 'Oh, well there's plenty of room here - there's probably more I could write down', so it goes along with what you said, that even normal everyday things like housework has a lot going on in it, maybe not day to day but over the long haul especially if you work too. (TV)

Other workers made similar comments.

> I think you're limited on the box size. Once you start to put something in you can't describe it all so it doesn't get all the stuff you know. (BD)

General observations that the SKP provoked new understandings of one's own skills were also discussed. It seems that one of the most difficult, but at the same time one of the most empowering aspects of the SKP was its requirement that experience - through a specific style of reflection - be translated into something somewhat more general. This is the process, refered to by Bloor and Butterfield (1994), in which experience through reflection be translated into learning. A typical comment such as the following helps to demonstrate.

> I've learned this and I learned this, but if I never thought of it in order to write it down - how would you be able to know where you could take it and put it somewhere else. Because otherwise you might not know. I wouldn't think about, you know, all the fork-lift experience, all the different steps in making the batches and stuff - *how could you take that and be able to apply it somewhere else if you didn't take the time to put it down* and say I know this and this and this, and wait a second, this qualifies me for over there. And this qualifies me for over here.... *If you see it on paper - that's a completely different story.* Because when I was going through this [the SKP] the informal type learning. I was amazed at all the stuff I was actually learning, all the stuff that I learned in the workplace. And if you actually got people *together* to sit down in a group like this, say all the people in your department, and said okay what did you learn so far since you've been in this department, like from your co-workers around you. *You could fill out 10 or 15 of these things easy.* And that's just from your workplace, what you learned which is not formal training. Because, you know we had a lot of formal training as well in the job, but when you write it all down you really see that we know a lot of stuff and everybody in that plant knows a lot of stuff. You forget about how much you learn because you do it every day and you think it's only second nature, but it's not when you think about it. Most of the things you do in there you

learned. Like the computer stuff you do in your department, driving the fork-lift, the safe procedures for doing things... Most of it is just out there doing it. (DJ)

However, the notion of 'style of reflection' is important here. Workers' descriptions of reflecting on experience changes as they move from formal to informal contexts; and, this shift involves a set of practices, a type of rationality, and presumes a certain logic underlying context of use. In the collective setting of the focus group, workers commented that the SKP encouraged them to expand their ideas of skills and knowledge to include things that they hadn't considered before.

RD: I'm saying not in the workplace, but outside of [the SKP] would it be useful? Maybe. I'd say, yeah I guess,
and it's valid too eh. If you can get credits towards a certain thing then I'd say absolutely - it should be done.
I mean if you've been through the learning once and you've got the experience - you should get full credit for it.
LR: Child-care too?
RD: Yeah, child-care 101!

Of course, for PLAR processes to be effective they must offer certain levels of validity and accountability. In the context of the workplace (e.g. for promotions) or the labour market (getting a job) - this seems to be especially important. In the workplace for example, companies require a certain level of assurance that often only integration of the PLAR with formal schooling, professional bodies, etc. can provide. In this extended segment of a transcript, a worker outlines a number of key points that concern these issues, and in the end offers an interesting suggestion.

BD: I think people are also afraid though. You could fudge in what ever you want here. Like if you don't have your
ticket and you work in maintenance - well you've been working there so long that they know you can do it all,
but you go to another employer and they'll say well where is your ticket. Well they're going to take the guy with
the ticket. Does it mean that the guy with the ticket knows better then the other guy - probably not depends on
the experience level.
I: So that's one thing that a college might be able to provide - an official stamp eh?
BD: Yeah.
I: So what does that official diploma say then?
BD: Depends on the particular situation. I mean obviously there are jobs out there that require a person to go to school
first in some cases. I mean to get the theory behind some stuff. Like would I take someone who's been at home
hacking on his computer on his own for 2 years over somebody who's been to school and taken data processing,
computer programming, windows and all that. Well it's going to look way better on a piece of paper than the guy
who just says, yeah, I've hacking on my computer for 2 years on my own. I mean honestly, you'd wonder, you got
a guy who's been hacking for 2 years and he could go ahead and put a virus on your computer and blow the whole
system away.
I: But lots of people with degrees fuck things up too don't they?
BD: Well that's true.
I: Do you think something like this form could help somebody who doesn't have the credentials compete in the
credential race?
BD: As it sits right now? No. It needs to be structured different. It needs to be more, I'm not trying to cut it up.

I: You should be.
BD: Well, it's too boxy, it's too Mickey Mouse, it just looks too basic eh. So it really has to be put into a form that
is more specific to the job and looking a lot more official.
I: So maybe one form to collect the information and another to present the information.
BD: Yeah.

The practical suggestion is that the SKP come in two formats: one format for collecting information; and, another for presenting this information in particular contexts. In this way, facilitation issues relevant to the collection stage can be modified for optimal effects in particular applications of the information.

It is constructive, though this general issue may be beyond the scope of this report, to reflect briefly at this point on a body of sociological literature called Ethnomethodology. It is constructive here because the approach seems to speak, in some ways, to the issue of "accountability" in a rigorous way, and specifically to the difficulty that PLAR participants have in "translating" their experiences into PLAR instruments. Although it is arguable, this approach can be associated with the perspective which I've presented above as "situated". Situated perspectives, in the way I am using the concept, involves a focus upon the way local interaction produces the meanings we typically take for granted as given, objective, or even universal, and can offer an empirical alternative (perhaps compliment) to the emerging post-modernist critique of essentialism in education. Situated perspectives, at the most basic level, priviledge actual, ongoing cultural-material practice over imputed constructions. Boden (1990) captures the central concern here nicely,

> ...people do what they do, right there and then, to be reasonable and effective and they do so for pervasively practical reasons and under unavoidably local conditions of knowledge, action and material resources (189)

As obvious as this may seem to people, closer inspection of much social scientific including educational thought[19] often subverts this basic notion.

Specifically, the ethnomethodological perspective casts various levels of doubt as to whether complex social relationships could ever be meaningfully represented in the context of a written or spoken statement.

This approach introduces the notion of a "documentary method" of cognition, i.e.

> ...the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings 'account-able'. The 'reflexive', or 'incarnate' character of accounting practices and accounts makes up the crux of that recommendation. (Garfinkel, 1967:1)

Indeed, several comments which workers made themselves flag this type of difficulty as well. Here a worker talks about how hard it is to translate the myriad of specific activities into a more general format. His solution is to have an instrument customized to the workplace. In the end however, he rejects this alternative as well.

BD: If the [SKP] was structured differently it might be able to be done. Like if the company were to do it they could
structure it with headings that are right dead on that would pull out all the little things we do maybe....
I: Do you think this form could capture that experience and learning that buy who's been working for years has?
BD: No.

As I briefly note in section 2.5 above, a situated perspective that builds from the traditions of Ethnomethodology states that particular ways of thinking and talking about activities (what Garfinkel calls "constructivist social science"[20]) attempt to produce the appearance of objective generalizations.

The approach of Garfinkel (Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970), in fact, claims that these types of social scientific practice do not reflect the phenomena they claim to, but rather reflect their own practice. They "accomplish" phenomena in terms of social science in such a way as to say much more about social science than any of the phenomena it claims to study.

> [T]he argument made by some ethnomethodologists (see Pollner, 1991) that the study of the reproduction of cognitive order in action radically disturbs beliefs in the fixed nature of all kinds of social order, including order in all forms of social scientific knowledge. Enthnomethodology in this sense has the mission to reinterpret unquestionable, timeless truths as locally contingent constructions that are always subject to change. (Cohen, 1996:129)

The appearance of generalization is understood from this perspective as a local practice carried out by professional (and lay) social scientists with a relatively unknown relation to the practices to which they claim to 'actually' refer. Actual practice in the fullness of its context, perspectives, time, place, foci - i.e. in full sensitivity to its *indexical nature* - are said to be unrepresentable in the forms of most social scientific portrayals typically undertake. Thus claims to represent other practices are, to varying degrees, self-referencing. In other words, educational research says more about the context of 'educational research' than it does about the actual practices that make up the phenomena of learning and education.

It is unclear the extent to which such claims can be partially or completely supported, but it is clear that current supportive approaches to PLAR would suggest these claims to be either false or only minimally relevant. In short, PLAR assumes the transferability of skills, knowledge and individual learning capacities: that general underlying features derived from diverse personal experiences are developed and useful in general terms. PLAR also assumes that these features can be meaningfully represented in challenge exams, interview settings, portfolios, etc. I am not suggesting here that these assumptions of PLAR (or any other types of educational assessment for that matter) are completely unfounded - however, it is clear that notions of transferability and validity are consistently seen as problematic for PLAR (and were it not for the largely self-referencing system of formal educational progression and credentialing this could be extended further). Given these arguments, we could say that problems of transferability, validity, etc. are not exclusively attributable to the various protocols and instruments, but rather lie in the nature of what we think constitutes the concept of learning, skills, knowledge, capacity, etc. These are the very questions which PLAR research has consistently failed to investigate.

We can further develop these basic arguments in regard to organized labour by reflecting on some recent scholarship emerging from South Africa. In a report by Lugg, Mabitla, Louw and Angelis (1998) it is outlined how workers in the South African PLAR research found it difficult to translate their knowledge into dominant forms. The initial explanation of the problem was that workers' knowledge and skills did not easily convert "orally" to assessment procedures. However, this explanation proved unsatisfactory on further investigation with workers commenting that once only observations could not do the trick either (p.208). What the LCCW research at the Ontario Industrial workers site, and traditions such as ethnomethodology might further suggest, however, is that even lengthy observations, oral examination, group discussions, and hands on demonstrations might not achieved satisfactory results. When examined critically, notions of "knowledge" and "skill" might not be understandable in individualized contexts beyond actual practice. "Knowledge" and "skill" might need to understood as 'language games' or at least social constructions that shift radically in the course of active local construction (in our case in the local construction of the research process). In essentialized terms, knowledge and skill may be 'myths', though, as with other salient myths, not without palpable material effects. These are far reaching and relevant conclusions for PLAR, however the immediately practical dimension of these concerns comes in the form of a warning that problems of PLAR's use are clearly not reducable to design features of the instrument.

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5. CONCLUSIONS

The LCCW project's Ontario Industrial workers' research site has offered a basic analysis of several key issues that are relevant to the PLAR research as well as to the labour education community. The central

goals of the overall project revolved around the need to examine both the development and applications of a new PLAR instrument, the "Skills and Knowledge Profile" (SKP) that would be uniquely suited to working class participants; and, to examine the types of strategies, practices and capacities of which working people typically make use. These two goals were seen to be mutually reinforcing as the understanding of a specific educational instrument and its applicability to specific groups entails a deeper understanding of the existing practices of these groups. Primarily qualitative data was analyzed to provide several important observations with regards to the relationships between workers' views and experiences of learning in the workplace and the classroom; dominant and alternative perspectives with regard to the learning practices; and, strategies workers traditionally use.

The SKP could also be understood to exhibit "situated" dimensions which, from a workers' standpoint, largely determined the perceived effectiveness of the instrument. The application of the SKP within the contexts of formal schooling, the workplace, the labour market, the local community as well as to the trade union local were all understood/anticipated by workers to be very different sets of experiences.

The social organization of skills, knowledge and learning processes were seen to be a significant issue in the context of working class learning strategies, workers' practices, and the progressive application of PLAR instruments such as the SKP. Critical development of workers' own views on their learning required alternative ways of thinking about skills, knowledge and learning capacity. Collective interaction, particularly in the context of the trade union was seen to be instrumental in the generation of these alternative views. In turn, the development of alternative perspectives on learning, skills and knowledge contributed to such important features of trade union action as class consciousness and worker solidarity.

In discussions of PLAR, the SKP, and Labour Unions we saw how notions of "class consciousness" are intertwined with informal learning relations. It was suggested that the traditional unionist focus on workers' solidarity could actually be viewed as, not only central to the labour movement, but to workers' learning practices specifically. The intersection of class consciousness, and the development of critical views on the power relations amongst various forms and conceptions of skill and knowledge led to discussion of the notion of a "Workers' Knowledge Bank". The active generation and modification of this idea in the focus group setting itself suggested that shifting the context of PLAR processes allowed the relations of PLAR to be significantly altered. In these 'altered' forms PLAR instruments such as the SKP could be seen as an opportunity to realize the oft-cited but seldom demonstrated "liberatory" dimensions of PLAR.

Finally, the SKP was discussed in-depth in terms of both its process and the actual instrument developed within the LCCW project. Many constructive critiques were gleaned from these data. In terms of the processes of PLAR, it was seen that collective contexts produced the most progressive effects on the ability to critically analyze relations of knowledge, skill and learning. The PLAR process was seen by workers to be a "worker solidarity building" event. Issues such as facilitation, the possibility of "transferability" and "generalization" in PLAR, and validity/accountability were also discussed by workers.

In terms of research on the issue of PLAR and trade unions relevant to this general issue of learning theory, several current examples are now emerging. One set of examples arises from recent experiences of the South African trade union movement cited above. Lugg et al. (1998; also see Cooper, 1998) conclude,

> If RPL is not deliberately designed to meet agreed and transformative purposes, it is likely to have a negative impact on the workplace, both in terms of industrial relations and workplace training, and work against a culture of learning. Instead of leading to equity through valuing different forms of knowledge and skill, RPL can lead to increased polarization and with this increased disadvantage. (Lugg et al. 1998:207)

The Learning Capacities project research helps to clarify the findings of the South Africans in two key ways. On one hand, in this report it's suggested that PLAR is most usefully understood by recourse to the 'situation', i.e. in the context of the social/historical relations in which PLAR is locally immersed.

The accounts of Mine and Metalworkers in South Africa appear to support this way of understanding PLAR (RPL) when they find that when PLAR is linked to internal, capital-controlled, human resource development structures; and, when PLAR is linked to individualized credentializing structures - it's transformative character is significantly degraded (from the inside). Destructive results for workers and their unions, such as this one, follow close behind.

> One shop steward described failing a worker who had spent many years as a hub-cap fitter, because the standard required a far broader range of competencies than this worker had been allowed to perform. (Lugg et al. 1998:208)

The basic relevance of a situated, praxis-perspective dove-tails with the traditional trade union precepts that institutions of centralized, hierarchical power are changed by social movement building, by popular ferment, by collective bargaining from positions of power, etc. The Learning Capacities Industrial Workers' research begins from (and affirms) the notion that gains are not made merely by making sound arguments in favour of fairness, social justice or even, in some cases, sound long-range productivity. Rather, the perspective that emerges from the workers in this report is that building strength in labour locals and communities of workers is the means by which the liberatory potentials of PLAR are realized. Contributions to social transformation in the context of PLAR are realized through workers own critical engagement with ways of understanding the relations between dominant and subordinate knowledge and learning vis-à-vis praxis. Beginning from this base notion, we can then begin to see that for PLAR to be effective for workers it must be somehow integrated with active movement building, collective bargaining and agitation for popular ferment. As the workers who discussed the notion of the "workers' knowledge bank" confirm - in this regard PLAR has considerable potential. Given this, it is highly doubtful (though necessary to explore) that the failures of PLAR/RPL in the South African workers' context can be cured through a rehabilitation of basic design features of the RPL instrument and process as Lugg et al. appear to have advocated. Though this rehabilitation will contribute to achieving the liberatory potentials of PLAR, the claim made in this report is that it is clearly not the sufficent to do so.

This supportive critique of the South African interpretation/experience is not a call to rehearse the well-worn unionist game of re-crimination/response along the lines of collaborationist reformism versus "truly" oppositional class politics (see Lovett, 1988; Simon, 1990; London, Tarr and Wilson, 1990; Welton, 1987 for discussions of this in terms of education). Rather, it is a call (for both "sides") to view the larger context of this battle. That it must be fought from the inside of joint structures and from the outside by oppositional movement building practices - a point not lost on Lugg et al.

> RPL, as a social process, has the potential to be one strategy within a much larger project to transform work and our society. (213)

5.1 Some Notes on Alternative Theories of Learning and PLAR

The full development of alternative modes of theorizing learning was not the object of this report. However, as I've suggested above PLAR scholarship must increasingly entertain this level of inquiry if it is to avoid merely rhetorical committments to notions of liberatory outcomes. The theorization of learning, more or less explicitly, is essential to the larger project of PLAR. In this short section, it is necessary to summarize some ways the analysis offered here is aligned with the possibilities of these alternative theoretical approaches. There are several essential points of contact between a radical PLAR and radical critiques of learning.

One of the simplest ways of understanding alternative theories of learning that I've found is introduced concisely in Cohen's (1996) essay on theories of action and praxis. While the author does not seek to draw conclusions on theories of learning per se, his approach as well suited for doing so, for radical theories of learning must ultimately be understood in terms of a more general theory of social action/praxis and participation in social life. In reviewing the founding problems and conceptual vocabularies of a range of theorists, Cohen discusses the distinction between subjective/normative action versus praxis using, on the one hand, the work of theorists such as Weber, Parsons, and on the other, Mead, Garfinkel and Giddens.

> In the broadest possible terms modern theorists typically assume one of two basic orientatons towards their subject matter. One orientation addresses the fundamental significance of subjective consciousness in the direction of action. The other points to the fundamental significance of social praxis, i.e. the enactment or performance of social conduct. (111-12)

In applying these observations to theories of learning we can begin to see how different approaches not only bear different emphases but also partly condition the outcomes of research itself. Specifically, Cohen's distinction help us see how certain theoretical approaches fit better with understanding the maintenance and reproduction of current social conditions while others offer some opportunity to focus upon those alternative practices that offer hope for social transformation. Clearly, the emphasis of the subjective/normative-based approaches on such issues as dominant subjective meanings (versus emergent ones), individual consciousness (versus collectively-based ones), etc. make these approaches less suitable for understanding the largely hidden and/or taken for granted everyday practices of subordinated groups such as the working class. Alternatively, the sensitivities, conceptual terms, and emphases of praxis-oriented approaches appear to be better suited to the understanding and documenting these practices and as such must be carefully considered by PLAR researchers wishing to take its liberatory qualities seriously. In the LCCW research the process of deconstructing dominant meanings and practice and actively pursuing an understanding of emerging ones has served as the basis for understanding the relations between working people and PLAR. Now, in terms of the distinction between different ways of theorizing social action/praxis that Cohen (1996) makes, we can begin to see a means toward a more general crtique of dominant learning theory.

The preceeding sections on PLAR as well as these latest section concerning the relationships between learning, PLAR and Labour Unions have begun to outline alternative applications, paths for development, and contexts of PLAR. Throughout the report we've also seen how the experiences which workers relate help us to envision the power relationships amongst dominant, subordinate and/or emergent notions of skill and knowledge. The social organization of these notions and the practices which actually give them substance begin to suggest the basis for alternative ways of thinking about learning itself. PLAR obviously depends on the recognition of alternative forms of practice which it seeks to make understandible as learning.

Critical research must begin with some understanding of dominant approaches to understanding learning. My own expanded attempt at this type of project in Sawchuk (forthcoming) begins from the work of a small group of others (e.g. Engeström, 1987; 1992; Lave, 1988; Lave and Wenger, 1991) and suggests that traditional modes of theorizing learning can be seen to have several key, systematic elements or 'biases'. These biases revolve around, what Engeström (1992) and others have called the "Cartesian view" but also parallel some of the basic interests of Cohen's (1996) work above. Briefly, in Sawchuk (forthcoming; see also Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming) I argue that in traditional or hegemonic modes of theorizing learning is understood as an individualized and cognitive-physical rather than social and interactional. Closely aligned with this view of learning as internalized and definatively individual is the notion that the process rather than being a contingent, ongoing, contextualized practice, is a largely universalized, temporally/spatially fixed event. Tying much of this together so that these biases come to have grounding in actual human practice is the effect of what I've called a "formal schooling/pedagogical" bias. This last feature is a bias of a very different kind from the others in that it includes elements of actual institutionalized practices as grounding the more abstract features of cognitivism and universalism. Evidence of the formal schooling bias can be seen in this report in that interviewees generally begin with the notion of learning as 'what goes on in a classroom' under the guidance of a leader performing some variation of pedagogy. Workers can then be seen to proceed, under appropriate conditions, in developing alternative views largely in the course of reflection on actual practice. In the literature these alternative modes of learning have typically been theorized under a range of headings: "experiential," "incidental," "informal," "self-directed," etc., etc. - however, to date, these concepts can also be seen to suffer from some if not all of the biases discusses above.

In my view one of the most productive emerging approaches to understanding learning can be seen in a particular cluster of scholarship. This cluster includes a variety of new and older traditions including: "Cultural-historical/Soviet psychology"; "Activity Theory"; "Distributed Cognition"; and, "Situated

Learning/Legitimate Peripheral Participation". Their intellectual roots are diverse including Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, certain streams of cognitive psychology and linguistics, as well as Marxism - however, using Cohen's basic distinction they can all be considered (more or less) praxis-based. The analysis presented in this report strongly supports an approach to understanding learning not as an individualized, cognitive-physical, universalized and internalized event defined by formal structures such as classrooms, schools and teachers; but rather, as a process of participation in particular spheres of social practice. Learning is thus defined by shifting forms of participation. Workers generated descriptions of this alternative sense of learning throughout the research. They also indicate that, though there are skilled people, the line between learner/teacher, and learning/teaching is often blurred to the point that young workers credit collective groups, e.g. a department, with the "teacher" role and that this teaching is a process that takes place over time in some form of actual practice. Conceptions of learning that cannot explicitly analyse for these forms of social practice will not only be inadequate in supplying convincing depictions of learning through it full range of variation, but more importantly will tend to reproduce existing systems of bias. Such biases are indicative of the (counter) subversion of the liberatory notions that most PLAR scholars entertain.

5.2 Recommendations

The following are recommendations for union-positive PLAR practice, the further development of PLAR instruments, and the effective use of PLAR by Labour Unions. They reflect both the practical and the theoretical observations that this research has brought to light.

A) Facilitation:

As we saw in this research and as has been dealt with periodically in previous PLAR research, the facilitation of PLAR processes is an important part of progressive outcomes. PLAR facilitation amongst workers requires a familiarity with workers' lives, workers' history and workers' realities. It also requires a basic understanding of the tendencies and patterns of dominant ways of viewing knowledge and skill - and how workers' praxis can overturn the limiting features of these notions.
Recommendation: It is recommended that if labour unions are to consider the application of PLAR that individual workers be provided with appropriate training in the knowledge-bases including previous PLAR research, and the social organization of skills and knowledge identified in this research for the purposes of understanding the processes through which workers' own learning is diverted, denigrated or ignored.

B) Collective PLAR:

In this report we saw how important collective reflection is for developing alternative, progressive views of workers' knowledge and skill. This requires the collective effort and interaction of workers themselves. Focus group-style formats, for example, may be ideal for these purposes.
Recommendation: It is recommended that if labour unions are to consider the application of PLAR that where possible group-formats of some kind be undertaken as the primary method of introducing, discussing, and administering the process. And, where possible to have shop stewards a part of this process.

C) PLAR for Collection / PLAR for Presentation:

In discussion of the use of the SKP, it was suggested by workers that while collecting, formulating and translating skills, knowledge and experiences into forms appropriate for PLAR required a certain type of instrument, that other formats may be more appropriate for presenting this information in particular settings ranging from the workplace to the local trade union.
Recommendation: It is recommended that if labour unions are to consider the application of PLAR that instruments, such as the SKP, be offered in flexible formats suited for the purposes such as collecting information, presenting information, sharing information with a group, etc.

D) The Development of Workers' Knowledge Banks:

One of the practical and exciting ideas that workers developed in the course of this research was the "Workers' Knowledge Bank". This was suggested as an alternative use of PLAR instruments such as the SKP. It would be a forum for workers not only to exchange skills and knowledge for practical, everyday purposes, but also for the facilitation of workers informal learning networks that are generally in operation to various degrees already. The expansion of these networks has the potential to invigorate the relevance of the trade union local, build solidarity and class consciousness when articulated with existing union structures. It is also important to recognize that any collection of information on the lives and activities of workers is valuable and must be protected from possible abuse by outside groups such as the employer.
Recommendation: While not a necessary part of the use of PLAR by labour unions - if this concept is developed it is suggested that it remain free and voluntary. It is also recommended that the information that workers collect be under the democratic control of the local membership. Administration of the process would ideally be put in the hands of an education committee and/or an elected executive position such as an "Education Officer".

E) Integration of PLAR Processes with Workplace Collective Bargaining:

While not dealt with specifically in the above analysis, the most suitable structure for the administration of any PLAR initiatives is the local trade union autonomously, or alternatively, as dictated by a legal collective agreement.
Recommendation: It is recommended that if labour unions are to consider the application of PLAR that the process be subjected to either direct control by the union or collectively bargained joint control.

F) Basic Research in Labour Education:

In this research it became apparent that radical theoretical work on the topic of learning and PLAR were important resources for workers. Similar to the natural sciences, in social sciences, we can make the distinction between applied and basic research. One is seldom appropriate without the other, yet currently, PLAR research only rarely deals with theoretical issues, and when it does workers' perspectives are seldom the focus.
Recommendation: It is recommended that in the context of PLAR as well as other educational initiatives that "basic" research be undertaken that specifically deals with workers' issues from the standpoint of workers'. Ideally, this would be undertaken by workers themselves. It is possible that progressive links with Labour Education specialists may prove useful in the development of these capacities.

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7. APPENDICES

A. SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE PROFILE (August 1997)

B.. MAIN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Building Learning Capacities Interview --

Establish objectives and approach of research project through open discussion with the respondent. YOU DON'T HAVE TO READ THE QUESTIONS VERBATIM. USE AS CONVERSATIONAL A MODE AS POSSIBLE.

I. BACKGROUND

1. Please tell me all about your current job. (GO SLOW HERE.)

   -current employment status (f/t,p/t, unemployed, retired, student, homemaker, etc)
   -description of type of enterprise, work site
   -job title and detailed description of activities
   -how did you learn to do this job
   -length of time in this job and with this employer
   -how did you get this job
   -formal qualifications required by employer for this job

2. Could you tell me how old you are?

II. LEARNING ACTIVITIES & THE SKP

1. Now let's look over the SKP form with an eye towards beginning to fill it out. At the same time I want to have you comment on any part of the form, the process etc. that you think could be improved and why.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP.

C. SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following supplemental schedule was developed within the industrial workplace portion of the research process itself. The goal of the supplementatl schedule was to have the interview process reflect: 1) the researchers' evolving understanding of the situtation as the research progress so that this information could also be systematically gathered in a way as to support the original goals of the project; 2) better the needs of the interviewees in within the context in which they were engaged as part of an appropriate Participatory Action Research method.

SKP Interviews: CEP Local 200-O

The SKP itself:

1) How do think a form like this one compares to a grade 12 diploma? Is one better or worse or are they just different?
How?

2) Do you think this form would have the ability to help people who generally don't end up getting formal school
credentials in the "credential race"?

3) What are you first impressions of this SKP form? How did filling out the SKP feel?

4) There's no place on the form for it, but can you recall teaching anybody anything recently?

PLAR processes:

5) Do you think this is a valid way to earn a credential? Why or Why not?

6) Human Resource people sometimes talk about people be "over-qualified" for a job? Do you think that a form like
this might make a person seem over-qualified for a job?

7) Do you think the form can capture all the learning you've done in your life adequately?

8) There's been some talk about the idea that this is a bit intrusive into a person's life - do you have any thoughts on
that? Like is there anyone who you wouldn't want to have access to this type of form?

Schooling, Knowledge and Credentials:

9) What do you think that schooling credentials say about a person?

10) Do you think there's a difference between school-knowledge and life-knowledge or practical-knowledge?

11) Do engineers in your plant have what you'd describe as knowledge?

12) Do you think that workers have knowledge?

13) Why do you think some workers have a hard time describing this knowledge?

The Situations of PLAR/SKP:

14) In the workplace for promotion?

15) In the job market to get a job?

16) For extra credit to go back to school?

17) For students to learn better what their skills and experiences are?

18) Just for oneself - as an uplifting confidence building experience?

19) Amongst co-workers as a "Knowledge Bank"? Could the union help in any way?

20) Other uses?

D. FOCUS GROUP INVITATION

ENDNOTES

1. Project directors Karen Lior (Advocates for Community Education and Training for Women) and D'Arcy Martin (formerly Education Representative: Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, Ontario Region). Funding for the project is provided by the National Literacy Secretariat, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board, the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Research Network (SSHRC), and JUMP Project of British Columbia.

2. Prior Learning Assessment is known in other societies under a variety of titles. For example: la reconnaissance des acquis experientiels (RAE)(French-Canada); Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)(U.K.); Prior Learning Assessment (PLA); Prior Learning Validation (PLV)(France); and, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)(Australia).

3. Reflecting the fact that the workplace employed only 3 women out of the 144 hourly-waged workforce, there is a small number of females (1) in the sample.

4. The 1994 Canadian Labour Force Development Board document "Putting the Pieces Together" outlines this feature, also mentioning how, along with those who have English as a second language and others not typically engaged in adult education programs of some kind (see also Thomas, 1998b), "non-transitional" PLAR participants (i.e. those who are not looking for work; or are students) are among the most often neglected in the literature.

5. Here the PLAR process actually refers to a good many practical activities including assessment via: the "challenge exam"; "portfolio" or "dossier" development; personal interview to name the most popular. Even within these there are a huge range of different policies, practices and regulations that govern their administration and potential outcomes.

6. Some examples of relevant exceptions to this third point are the work of: Elana Michelson (1996; 1998); Boud, Keough and Walker (1985); Boud (1985); and, Usher, Bryant and Johnstone (1997); Cooper, (1998).

7. Here the PLAR process actually refers to a good many practical activities including assessment via: the "challenge exam"; "portfolio" or "dossier" development; personal interview to name the most popular. Even within these there are a huge range of different policies, practices and regulations that govern their administration and potential outcomes.

8. Initials are coded to protect anonymity in all direct quotations. In addition: I = Interviewer

9. Of course at other times workers express profound alienation in their work:

You know it's like, 'I hear your job pays $25 an hour. Well what do you do there?' I just say, 'I don't know really - it's

$25 an hour man. Who cares what the fuck I do.' (BD)

See Hamper (1992) for the fuller expression of these forms of profound alienation and the ways that workers on the line

attempt to battle it.

10. This notion of "real" or "actual" should be clarified a bit. The suggestion is that the essential features of these "differences", i.e. the things that we look to to decide that they are different, are the results of our own (collective) practices cemented over time. This in no way entails that these differences are "unreal" in the sense that they are imagined. These differences have very real material effects despite the realization of their socially constructed character.

11. I use this notion of "canon" carefully as it is not, as the term in some ways seesms to suggest, an entirely stable collection of knowledge, skills and practices. The canon has fluid qualities that make is flexible, expandible in such ways as to contain any serious challenges to it. This type of description is, essentially, a description of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971).

12. In fact, according to some research traditions it *is* impossible to capture the meaning of these relations in research that is removed from the actual practice it seeks to comment on. The argument is that due to the indexical nature of language, i.e. the fact that things literally cannot be fully related 'in-so-many-words', the only accurate assessment of practice is to be found in in-depth sequential analysis of actual practices (Garfinkel, 1967).

13. The relatively militant nature of the local helped this process along, as did the basic framework of the research. I do not mean suggest that simply bringing workers together in one place does the trick. Again, Dunk's (1991) work establishes this quite clearly.

14. "Tickets" refer to a specific skill-trade certification gained from a formal institution which often require periodic renewal.

15. According to the NALL Survey on Informal Learning (Livingstone, 1998), in Canada this basic trend may be shifting somewhat in absolute terms (i.e. greater participation levels among workers), but it is important to also note relative changes in this participation. Total participation is also on the rise which suggests the "credential inflation" effects that, in relative terms, maintains the relevancy of the basic dynamic (i.e. "them-who-has-gets").

16. For further theoretical discussion of notions of informal learning which have now only recently begun to emerge in educational literature - see Sawchuk (1998b; 1998c) and particularly Sawchuk (forthcoming) and Livingstone and Sawchuk (forthcoming).

17. The so-called "Quality Movement" and TQM (Total Quality Management) are specific managerial programmes for workplace reorganization. One management consultant defines it as, "a cooperative form of doing business tht relies on the talents and capabilities of both labour and management to continually improve quality and productivity using teams" [Jablonski, J. (1990) Implementing TQM: Competing in the 1990's. Albuquerque: Technical Management Consortium Inc.]. For labour perspectives in North America begin with Parker, M. and Slaughter, J. (1990) Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept. Detroit: Labour Notes/South End Press.

18. "Limited" in the sense that extended, multiple interview sessions with each participant would provide a depth of understanding of the web of historical, social relations involved. In addition, as I argue in Sawchuk (forthcoming) - it is desirable to use several different approaches to data collection such as detailed, fine-grained analysis of actual "learning" activities, as well as full depictions of the social context of these activities. In this way micro-analysis of interaction, people's understanding of their and others activities, as well as the social historical context that structures these activities mutually inform each other to provide far more definitive statements.

19. Partial exceptions to this in educational thought are to be found in some post-modern discussions (e.g. Usher, Bryant and Johnstone, 1997) as well as a small range of other approaches to radical educational theory (e.g. Giroux, 1983; Hart, 1992; and others).

20. It is important to note the range of the use of the notion of "constructivism" within sociological literature. Here, Garfinkel wishes to emphasize the attempts of social sciences to construct context-independent, universalized ways of understanding specific practices.